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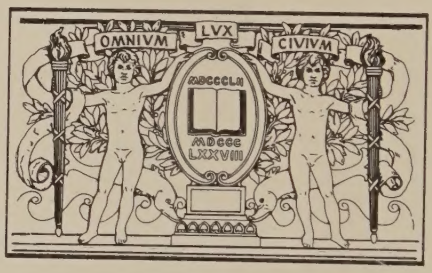

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SCANDINAVIAN CLASSICS

VOLUME XVIII

THE BOOK ABOUT LITTLE BROTHER

BY

GUSTAF af GEIJERSTAM

THIS VOLUME IS ENDOWED BY
MR. CHARLES S. PETERSON
OF CHICAGO

THE BOOK ABOUT LITTLE BROTHER

A STORY OF MARRIED LIFE

BY

GUSTAF af GEIJERSTAM

TRANSLATED FROM THE SWEDISH WITH
AN INTRODUCTION BY EDWIN BJÖRKMAN

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GUSTAF AF GEIJERSTAM

THE entire nineteenth century was marked by an increasing literary and artistic awakening in the three Scandinavian countries. At the beginning of that century, their literatures were still local, in spite of the appearance of such poets as Tegnér in Sweden, Oehlenschläger in Denmark, and Wergeland in Norway. Long before the century ended, those three literatures had assumed universal importance, and in the drama particularly, the Scandinavian countries were recognized as leading the world.

The reasons for this seemingly sudden but long prepared development were, as may be guessed, many and complicated. In the main, however, it depended on a re-discovery of the national spirit through a study of the past in the light of modern science and thought. The movement that produced Ibsen and Björnson, Georg Brandes and J. P. Jacobsen, Strindberg and Ola Hansson as its first and foremost flowers, sent one root down into the old sagas and another into the actual life led by the mass of the people in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. It was the result of a constructive comparison between the characters of the old saga heroes and the characters still shaping and guiding the every-day history of three living and striving nations.

If the Scandinavian literatures of the early nineteenth century deserved the epithet local, the explanation lay in the fact that they still, on the whole, represented imitations of foreign models in Scandinavian dress. When Ibsen and Björnson had fought their way to understanding of their own true natures, and when Jacobsen and Strindberg, standing on the shoulders of those pioneers, sprang into full-fledged achievement out of seeming nothingness, the literatures of their making drew both contents and form out of the native soil. Ibsen's "Be thyself" was the sign in which those literatures conquered, and it is still the sign in which they continue their onward march.

The leaders, however, would have availed little without followers. Greater as their brightness undoubtedly was, the names mentioned above were not the only ones worthy of universal record and remembrance. Around those chieftains stood, in each of the three countries, a host of writers second only to them in importance, and often great enough in themselves to have won wider fame, had they not been overshadowed by greatness surpassing their own. Among these a conspicuous place was held by the man whose work hereby for the first time is introduced to the English-speaking world.

Gustaf af Geijerstam lived so largely in his work, and all he did was so closely identified with it, that a few lines might suffice for the external

facts of his career. He was born on January 5, 1858, in the Swedish province of Westmanland, where his father owned and operated some iron works. An economic crash forced the father to seek a new career, and his academic education enabled him to obtain a position as public school inspector. His sons, of whom Gustaf was the eldest, were brought up in the little city of Kalmar on the southeastern coast of Sweden. Across a narrow strait lies, like a breakwater, the long-drawn island of Öland, whence later in life Geijerstam drew so much of the material used for his best peasant stories.

As a boy of nineteen, Geijerstam went to Uppsala to complete his studies at the ancient university. Two years later he took his B. A. and soon after left the place forever, turning to the capital in search not only of a livelihood, but of a life worth living. This, according to his own confession in *Erik Grane,* he had been unable to find in the little academic town, which seemed equally symbolized by the Gothic *Codex Argenteus,* still resting in its library, and by the floods of Swedish punch streaming through its innumerable student-haunts.

About the time young Geijerstam reached Stockholm, Strindberg was publishing his *Red Room.* The same year of 1879 brought Ibsen's *Doll's House,* while Jens Peter Jacobsen's *Niels*

Lyhne appeared in 1880. Björnson was preparing to break with dogmatic Christianity, and during the decade just ending, Georg Brandes had delivered those epoch-making courses of lectures at the University of Copenhagen which are now known to the whole world under their common title, *Main Currents of Nineteenth Century Literature.* The Naturalistic wave had reached the Scandinavian countries, disturbing old and young in equal degree, though in widely different manners. Rebellion was in the air. Old standards and old principles were challenged along the entire line. Life and literature, so long strangers to each other, seemed to have met at last.

Like most of the younger men, Geijerstam was carried away irresistibly by the new movement. The first result of his new enthusiasm was a volume of short stories, *Bleak Days,* which attracted favorable attention more on account of their sincerity than of their art. Another collection of stories followed the next year, 1883. At the same time Geijerstam published a volume of literary studies, *Contemporaries,* dealing with some of the principal leaders of the new literary movement in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. It contained also a study of Strindberg, which, although most sympathetic, dared to charge his *New Kingdom* with containing "matters unworthy of himself," and which, at that early date, quoted against him the

words once directed to another Swedish writer of Strindbergian character, "Your writings, Sir, are a mixture of genuine truth and private grouch."

In an autobiographical sketch entitled *My First Peasant Story,* Geijerstam has told us what happened to him in that year 1883. He had done with Uppsala. He had not yet found what he was looking for in the life of the capital. Instinctively he turned to the plain people of the country districts for what he could not find in the hectic life of the cities. Some sense of community seems to have drawn him to the peasant, and more particularly to the inhabitants of the islands scattered along the Swedish coast, half of the soil and half of the sea. Hiring a room from one of the peasant-fishermen on an island outside of Stockholm, at the very edge of the open sea, he proceeded to study those people at first hand. He even tried to share their food, but found to his humiliation that he could barely swallow it and certainly not live on it. For weeks he found himself isolated and subjected to all sorts of suspicions on the part of men and women who had never heard of a man living by his pen. But at last his general good nature conquered all resistance, and he was taken into the confidence of his host and all the rest. His first use of the new material was embodied in the story named *Criminals.* With three others, it was published in 1884 under the title, *Poor People,*

and with this book Geijerstam's position as a writer of power and purpose was established.

The confiscation of Strindberg's *Marriage* took place in 1884. In order to protect his publisher, Strindberg was forced to return in haste from the continent to face a criminal charge of blasphemy, based on a superannuated and long forgotten statute. The trial ended with a verdict of not guilty and turned into a tremendous triumph for the accused author. But while the matter was still pending, the country was shaken as rarely before by the conflict of opinions. Almost without exception, the writers of the new generation stood by the man whom all regarded as the foremost in their ranks, and in whom many wished to find a recognized leader. But with such plans Strindberg had little patience, though he never questioned his own superiority. In so far as leadership was involved at that particular juncture, it fell on Geijerstam, and for a while it seemed as if his position might become permanent. The appearance, in 1885, of his partly autobiographical novel *Erik Grane* strengthened his literary reputation considerably, not the least by exposing him to furious attacks from the leaders of the old school. In 1885 and 1886, he edited two "annual reviews," to which contributions were furnished by Anne Charlotte Edgren-Leffler, Oscar Levertin, George Nordensvan, Ellen Key, "Ernst Ahlgren" (pseu-

donym for Mrs. Victoria Benedictsson), Axel Lundegård, Alfhild Agrell, Hjalmar Branting, Geijerstam himself, and his hardly less talented brother Karl — in fact, by almost everybody comprised within the group of rising talents popularly named "Young Sweden." If nevertheless Geijerstam's leadership soon ceased, it was perhaps because the forces to be led were far too heterogeneous for any permanent organization. Or maybe his own gifts were not sufficient for a position which Strindberg himself, had his inclinations been different, would have found difficulty in maintaining. Perhaps, finally, Geijerstam's first marriage, contracted in 1885, and the need of keeping the pot boiling a little faster than before, had something to do with his definite turn toward creative endeavor. It is the end of that marriage we find related in *The Book About Little Brother.*

From 1884 to his death in 1909, Geijerstam poured out an unbroken stream of stories, novels, and plays, while at the same time, during the greater part of that quarter century, he engaged in journalistic work or acted as literary advisor to one of the big publishing houses at Stockholm. Of his plays little need to be said here, although one of them, *Criminals,* based on the short story with the same title, was produced at the *Theatre de l'Oeuvre* in Paris. He wrote several amusing and successful comedies from modern life, the best and

most widely known being *Father-in-law*. His peasant plays, which helped to produce the break between him and Strindberg — who thought that Geijerstam had stolen his own ideas out of *The People at Hemsö* — proved even greater theatrical successes and remain popular on the Swedish stage to this day. But they have no importance from a literary point of view. Nor does Geijerstam seem to have placed any false estimate on their value. It was only as a story writer and novelist that he made a mark in Swedish literature and produced works worthy of notice outside his native country. It is only as such that we need to consider him here.

All that Geijerstam produced in the form of fiction falls under four heads: 1) naturalistic problem stories; 2) stories of peasant life; 3) intimate stories of married life; 4) stories of "olden time" (*i.e.*, the 40's and 50's of the last century). Into the first line he was forced by the tendency of the time, yet while he produced some very respectable results in this field, it was not there that he rose to his greatest height. *Erik Grane*, with its strong autobiographical element, was full of sincere indignation against the old academic spirit that prepared the young generations for school and not for life. It was a burning arraignment of the young people themselves, who had turned from romantic vagabondage to cold-blooded self-seek-

ing. It represented also a well-meant but not very successful effort to seek a cure for the disease of the age in the rising of a new "estate," that of the workmen. Equally tired of Uppsala and literary Stockholm, *Erik Grane* becomes a mechanic and marries a girl of the people, with whom he is represented as "living happily forever after." The later Geijerstam had no such illusions. Although, as I have already suggested, the book created a great stir in its day and brought its author a rich harvest of praise as well as abuse, it was too diffuse in form and too vague in thought.

Pastor Hallin, published in 1887, marked a distinct advance in both respects. It is the story of a young man destined for the ministry, who develops conscientious scruples. Gradually these scruples ripen into a conviction of unfitness for the career he has prepared himself to enter. But it is a career in a preëminent degree, and purely worldly considerations prevent him from risking it. Against him stand his sister and his fiancée—by far the most sympathetic and best drawn characters in the book—both of whom denounce what they regard as a betrayal of his ideals. Late in life Geijerstam returned to similar lines in his *Battle of Souls,* where he pictures the snares of modern business, and partly in *Dangerous Forces,* where, however, the social problem has become quite subordinate to the working out of one of

those ill-adjusted individual destinies that always caught Geijerstam's fancy more than anything else.

It was in his peasant stories that Geijerstam first found himself. Two themes seemed in particular to fascinate him in dealing with the humble tillers of the soil: first, the cramping harshness of their conditions; and secondly, the dark remnants of primitive, almost savage instincts that linger in their souls ready to break out whenever the pressure of external circumstances favors their release. The key to his conception of the peasant was given in his very first peasant story, *Criminals,* in which he wrote: "The population was neither better nor worse than elsewhere, and the same was true of their education. For most of them life passed away in an incessant struggle to find the necessaries of existence, and it was this struggle that made the people what they were. Of course, Christianity had prevailed for more than one thousand years, and it was said that it had softened the customs, disposed of superstition, and improved the people. But thinking of it in his solitude, it seemed to the pastor as if, with a few modifications, everything remained as it was pictured in old legends about bygone generations. The same savage nature lived on, unbroken and destructive, in spite of church bells, hymn singing and popular schools . . . Hunger and love—that was the whole story."

White Winter, in the second volume of stories named *Poor People* (1889), is an epic of the life led by those humble toilers on outlying and stone-strewn farms that face conditions from day to day which even the dwellers in a metropolitan slum district would find unbearable. When illness comes to such a place after the snow has fallen day and night, night and day, for nine whole days, then tragedy is in the air, but of this nothing is known to those most nearly concerned. Like dumb animals, they take what comes, of evil or of good, as something inevitable that has to be borne without protest or complaint.

Of the same type, but relieved by a strong element of humor, is *Peter with the Eye* in the same volume. It is the story of a boy, naturally ugly, who has been made conspicuously so by an accident to one of his eyes, and who thus becomes an object of mirth and ridicule to everybody that sees him. He grows into a strong man and a hard and faithful worker, well able to take care of himself. But the nickname from his youth sticks, and while no other man cares to apply it, the women dare, and they have no use for him on account of his looks and his timidity. Yet the same desire burns within him as within the handsomest man on earth. In his despair, he fastens his affection on a girl of notoriously loose manners, and in the end he gains her — when lovers are getting scarce. Even then

she refuses to give up her old habits, and he does not interfere. To his old father, who comes to protest, he replies briefly that as long as he was satisfied, others could have no ground for complaint. Some might call Peter strangely modern in his views. Certain it is that Geijerstam created a remarkably consistent and convincing figure that leaves in the reader's memory a sense of admiration not at all lessened by the accompanying smile. Sammel, who gives the name to one of the best stories in *Forest and Sea,* is first cousin to Peter, though at once more tragic and less attractive in his characteristics. He is a sailor boy, with an unquenchable love for the sea, who gets caught on shore by an unpremeditated love affair. The attempt to make a farmer of him is futile, but even when he gets a pilot's certificate and is able to spend most of his time on the water, his old longing and his sense of being captured and imprisoned will not leave him. Envied by others, and never satisfied himself, he lives in a conflict between duty and inclination that gradually leads him to the bottle, to poverty, to public scorn, and to a search for "compensation" that turns him first into a brute and then into a child.

As a rule, however, it was the still darker strains in the primitive mind that lured Geijerstam and held his main interest. He seemed fascinated by those stories of almost unbelievable crimes now

and then reaching a startled world from little isolated farmsteads. *Parricide* in *The Sheriff's Tales* is a typical example of this phase of his writing. Many have called it his best peasant story and termed it classical in its fatalistic tragedy. The story is very simple in its outline. A wanton woman, married to a kind and decent man of good standing, conceives an almost inexplicable, but far from impossible, hatred of her husband. Having tried to poison him and failed, she gradually goads her two sons into murdering their father under the most brutal circumstances. How she leads them on, step by step, to that point, and how they behave under the burden of their own crime, forms the main part of the story, which has a great deal of compelling power. What it lacks is some sort of psychological explanation that would make the reader grasp why the woman had to do what she did. The same thing applies to most of Geijerstam's stories of this type. It is particularly true of *Nils Tufvesson and His Mother* — the novel in which he dared to take for his theme the incestuous love of a peasant woman for her son and the subsequent murder of the son's wife at the behest of the mother. Based on an actual happening, which the story closely follows, that story tells us in substance: This is what they do at times, but heaven only knows why! Geijerstam wrote before the psychology of Freud had become suf-

ficiently developed and known. For this reason he had to be content to apply the epithet of "mysterious" to many an action for which we can find motives to-day. And yet this was the case only when he dealt with the life of the peasants, where he thought himself particularly at home, thus giving new emphasis to the cry of Georg Brandes that writers should deal only with the life actually known to themselves. The case was different when he began to write about married life among people of his own class — or shall we say, perhaps, about his own married life?

What I have just said is well illustrated by a story that stands midway between his peasant stories and his stories of married life. It is *Love* in the collection named *Forest and Sea* (1903). The man and woman at the centre of the story are of peasant class, but this fact is wholly subordinate. It is a study of a man's desire for a woman who can give him devotion, affection, motherly care, and so on, but who, for some reason unknown to herself and unrevealed to us, can never give herself fully and wholly either to him or to love. After the man has been married twice, the second time most disastrously, she consents to become his wife in order to save him from a third marriage like the second. The result is what might be expected — a perennial conflict of irreconcilable instincts — and yet both conclude on the edge of

the grave that they have been happier than they would have been apart, and that they have given and received to the utmost possibilities of their respective natures. As it stands the story is wonderfully told and wonderfully true. It lacks explanatory background, so to speak. The young woman is what she is — a miracle, or a mystery, or a monster — and with that we have to be satisfied, although what we want most of all is a suggestion of the causes that made her what she became. To be sure, a similar lack may often be felt when Geijerstam deals with related problems within his own class, but it is never so palpable or harassing. There are many things in *The Book About Little Brother* which need explanation and are left unexplained by the author. The difference is that they are told in such a way, with such a wealth of detail and background, that we can find explanations for ourselves with the help of the new psychology. In other words, by the telling of such a story in such a way, the author has given proof of a knowledge based on an intuitive understanding of personal experience, and not on information received from without.

The first herald of Geijerstam's entry into the field which is particularly his own — the field where I, for one, think him greatest — was a little story named *Life's Misunderstandings,* in the collection bearing the common title of *Stockholm*

Stories (1892). It is the story of a young woman fanatically — the word is Geijerstam's own — in love with her husband. She has loved once before with equal intensity — a young painter who died by accident. And the author says in describing her peculiar nervous constitution, "She might hide her inability to forget, but forget she could never." There is the cue. A chance meeting with a man resembling the first object of her young love starts a morbid train of thought, out of which gradually springs a state of mind that spells disaster. Day after day she sees her dead lover by her side, and she feels as if she were living in adultery. Her normally constituted husband is utterly unable to understand; and when he draws back from her in a state bordering on hatred, there is nothing left for her but to cease living. The situation is more artificial, but hardly less pungent than the situations furnishing the themes for Geijerstam's best books in this field. All of them might have for a common motto this sentence from *Dangerous Forces* (1905):

"The relationship between human beings is very precarious. The threads that tie them together are imperceptible, but still more imperceptible are the forces which corrode those invisible ties, making them rot and break."

That story marked a departure more radical than the mere development of a new subject

matter. During the first ten or twelve years of his literary career, Geijerstam was frankly and rather aggressively naturalistic in his methods as well as in his professions. Considering his later development, it seems safe to assert that, during the period in question, he did constant violence to his own nature. Although a practical man, forthright in his attitude, and full of fondness for the joys and sorrows of the passing moment, he had a strong mystical strain in his make-up, and he was never himself until that strain came into its own. So it did with *Medusa's Head* (1895), the first novel he published in eight years. In the meantime Swedish literature, led by Selma Lagerlöf, Verner von Heidenstam, Oscar Levertin, Per Hallström and others — while Strindberg was passing through his *Inferno* period — had turned in its entirety from naturalism to neo-romanticism. Contemporary critics charged the former standard-bearer of the naturalistic movement with having changed himself deliberately and forcibly in order to remain in the swim. The truth seems to be that, just before writing *Medusa's Head,* Geijerstam passed through a mental and spiritual crisis almost as deep-reaching as that of Strindberg, though externally less marked. In fact, it struck so deep into the secret recesses of his soul that, for a while, he seriously contemplated deserting the author's calling forever. And when he

was able to write *Medusa's Head,* it meant simply that his true nature had conquered at last, and that thenceforth he meant to write without reference to any rules or tenets not sprung out of the demands of his own soul. That book marked a declaration of independence, and not a surrender. Apropos of this book and *The Comedy of Marriage,* Strindberg wrote to Geijerstam in 1898, "Your development with and after *Medusa's Head* is miraculous."

The explanation of the title is given in the prologue, where a young poet says: "What I call Medusa's head is that we see so much that is wrong and mean — that we learn every morning about all the pettiness that fills the world."

The head of Medusa is the paralyzing force of the small and mean and selfish considerations of everyday humdrum life. And only those who try to fight it are in danger of being turned into stone by its ghastly visage. The rest seek a refuge in commonplaceness and join that host to which a character in another of Geijerstam's books refers as "We living dead." Like most of his later books, *Medusa's Head* is a strand woven out of many threads. The relationship between husband and wife plays a conspicuous part, as I have already suggested, but the main stress is laid on other human relationships. The whole book might, in fact, be described as a contrast of two

temperaments: that of Tore Gam, the hero, who perishes in his fight against things as they are, and Sixten Ebeling, who, true to his own nature, not only refuses to fight, but fails to see why any one should engage in such a futile undertaking. The latter says of himself in a moment of scathing self-realization: "I was saturated with that foremost maxim of life which is called disinclination to make oneself ridiculous — a maxim that breeds every form of cowardice, from the moral one that protects our prejudices and renders us insensible of misfortune, to the intellectual one that prevents us from crossing the border where our knowledge comes to an end." Of their mutual relationship, Tore Gam says in another place: "What has always stood between us like an invisible wall that we could not pass was this — to be, or not to be satisfied with the crumbs offered by life; to surrender, or not to surrender; to adapt oneself, or to despise such a makeshift arrangement."

In spite of much loose writing and some loose thinking, the book is characterized by a tremendous psychological suspense. Especially the latter part of it, where the story is told by Tore Gam himself, in his diary, grips the reader irresistibly and fills him with a feeling of awe akin to what we experience in reading a Greek tragedy. The chief weakness of the book lies in a fact that quarrels only with the premises established in the in-

troduction, but not at all with the story itself as later developed: the fact that the main cause of Tore Gam's tragic end lies within himself, in his own nature, and not in the petrifying power of any social forces hostile to his own fate. There is a weak spot in him from the start, probably inherited, and perhaps pathological — a spot that marks the predestined breaking point when the strain between his endeavor and his nature becomes too great. In this conflict between will and power, the external world plays a wholly secondary part, though one that well deserves attention in itself.

During the six years from 1895 to 1901 appeared the five books that to me mark Geijerstam's highest literary achievement, all of them but one being intimate studies of the psychology of marriage — some of them, like *The Book About Little Brother,* so intimate that they called forth angry protests on the part of incensed critics. To such critics Geijerstam answered in the epilogue to his novel *Woman's Power* (1901):

"Such is the poet, I said to myself. People read his work and wonder that he can give himself so wholly and unreservedly. They cannot know that the extreme candor fretting his heart until it takes tangible shape, has been carried so long within him that when he gives vent to it at last, it is like

an upheaval of nature that takes place against his will and can be stopped by nothing."

The protests seem the more peculiar in the light of a certain reticence characterizing all of Geijerstam's work after 1895. When we hear a work charged with being too intimate, we think naturally of too frank revelations concerning sexual matters. And all such revelations are missing in Geijerstam's work. The physical facts are merely implied. What interests him are the psychological overtones. The "imperceptible forces corroding the invisible ties" between man and woman may have their roots in sex, but they appear under all sorts of confusing shapes, and Geijerstam gives as they appear — as whimsical, self-willed vagabonds of thought that come and go like the wind, not without cause, not in any lawless fashion, but in ways that leave us puzzled and confounded. One might almost say that his pet theme was the relative insignificance of whatever has the power to sunder souls once united by love. This theme is plentifully illustrated in the earlier part of *The Book About Little Brother*. Perhaps the author wished to indicate the soil in which such matters grow, or the atmosphere from which they draw their weird power, when he made the husband in that book say as he looked back upon the relationship between his dying wife and himself: "I cherished what she said in accordance with my

desire, and forgot what she said in opposition to it."

There are four stories of marriage in the collection named *The Struggle for Love* (1896). Two of these — *Old Letters* and *The Yellow House* — approach Geijerstam's high-water mark. The weirdness of the unconscious factors swaying so much of our lives is strikingly illustrated in the first of those stories, where at times, as in the first part of *Medusa's Head,* there is an atmosphere strongly suggesting that of a highly subtilized ghost story. Those stories are, nevertheless, nothing but studies for the larger canvases produced subsequently.

Many Swedish critics have declared *Lost in Life* (1897) the biggest book Geijerstam ever wrote. It is big, to be sure, but to me it does not compare with *The Comedy of Marriage* or *Woman's Power.* It is rather out of the line indicated above, being the story of a workingman who, by the supposed pressure of external circumstances, is gradually led to kill the thing he loves most in life, his own little son. The book was perhaps meant as a social *J'accuse,* but as in *Medusa's Head,* so here again, Geijerstam was led astray — or saved — by his main interest, which dealt with the workings of the human mind rather than the shortcomings of the social organism. Of well founded social criticism there is plenty in the book, and

much of it holds good no less to-day than it did thirteen years ago — holds good in the United States of 1920 as it did in Sweden of 1897. Some of it is artistically warranted because it helps to explain why Ivar Lyth, the hero of the book, became what he proves to be. Nevertheless the book remains a study of individual temperaments, rather than of social conditions; of clashing individual wills and desires, rather than of souls crushed by the Juggernaut of modern industry. What drove Ivar Lyth to his killing of "the thing he loved" was his wife, and not the factory. Had they been financially independent, the little boy — who, by the way, is one of the most charming among Geijerstam's many entrancing and life-like child figures — had not been drowned by the hands of his own father, but I have no doubt that he would have perished in some other way, and no less logically by the worthlessness of his mother. I insist on this fact, not in defense of the modern factory, but in order to bring out the real source of Geijerstam's strength as a writer. He possessed a fine moral indignation, and a never-failing sympathy with the downtrodden and unfortunate, as practically all of his books witness; but this indignation was not his chief motive power as a writer. On the contrary, it tended to lead him astray, because what, above all else, made him write was a passionate love for the manifestations of life in

all its forms, good or bad. It was because he loved life so intensely, and believed in it with such a persistent faith, that he turned instinctively to its darker sides, as if in search of an explanation that might vindicate his faith.

The Comedy of Marriage (1898), which Strindberg liked and praised, is the story of a marriage between two thoroughly good people. Its course should have run smoothly from start to finish, and it would probably have done so but for those strange crotchets of the human soul which Geijerstam loved to gather for his psychological herbarium. In a moment of unusual intimacy, a friend of both husband and wife confesses to Bob Flodin, the husband, that once he loved the latter's wife with a love known from the start to be hopeless. The husband is warned and implored to say nothing of this to his wife, but being unaccustomed to hide anything at all from his life partner, he fails to keep his promise. From that moment the friend seems to stand between husband and wife. They seem unable to talk of anything else. Jealousy plays no part, and yet the chasm between them grows wider daily, until one day the woman is convinced of being in love with the friend and of being unable to live without him. A divorce and a new marriage follow. The friend shows himself to be what he is, a rather unscrupulous and wholly selfish climber, and for the first time

the woman learns what true marital unhappiness means. Then her little boy from her first marriage, who has stayed with his father, is taken sick and dies. She is called to his death-bed, and at that bed she and her first husband re-discover their old love—a love that, in fact, has never been dead in either of them. The plot means little. The worth and the charm of the story lies in the description of what happens in the minds of those two human beings from day to day. Particularly charming is the picture of the relationship that grows up between father and son after the mother has left the home. From first to last Bob is as attractive a figure as may be found in modern fiction, but he is never more so than when he has the vision and largeness of mind to take his little boy into his full confidence concerning things generally supposed to be unfit for communication to a child. Winning the child keeps the worst bitterness out of his heart, and it is because he succeeds in keeping it out, that he has a place open for his wife when she finally discovers the true state of her own heart.

The end of *The Comedy of Marriage* is what we call happy. So is that of the story named *The Yellow House,* where all that the forgiving wife has to say to her recovered husband is, "How we have strayed!" Other similar stories of Geijerstam have endings that may be called unhappy.

But that is neither here nor there. The ending meant so little to him. It was the beginning that meant everything—the appearance of those strange sundering forces that come out of seeming nothingness and sow hatred where love has grown for years. In *The Comedy of Marriage* he wrote of those forces: "It is a dangerous thing when two people who have loved each other get to the point where both lie awake in the dark nursing their own thoughts, while neither one dreams of speaking to the other. It is still worse when they become mutually conscious of each other. It is then the evil thoughts begin to do their work." Why should this be so? There must be an explanation. Some day we shall find it, undoubtedly. Perhaps Freud and his followers are actually on the trail. But Geijerstam could only, as he did in *The Yellow House,* refer us to "the fate at which we stare with a mixture of horror and curiosity, and which, nevertheless, we never manage to decipher." What of it? Art should not explain as science does, or tries to do. Yet the explanation is implicit in art at its greatest, and so I think it is in those of Geijerstam's books which I am now discussing. Some day the explanation he could not find will be furnished by the natural progress of human thought.

The hope that such may be the case is strengthened by an analysis of *Woman's Power* (1901),

which book, without going one step beyond the proper limits of a piece of fiction, might be suspected of being written in illumination of certain Freudian theories and discoveries. Out of a sense of duty that we cannot but call mistaken, a man of unusual moral and intellectual refinement marries a little shop girl, who, by the merest of chances, has become his willing mistress. His step is dictated by the coming of a child. The marriage proves disastrous, as might be expected. The woman was little better than a prostitute, and such she remains in spite of her improved conditions and position. Having discovered her in a situation that leaves nothing to be doubted, the husband sends her to America, keeping their little girl with himself. She is another of Geijerstam's wonderfully drawn children — perhaps the star picture in his gallery. So much is introduction. The rest of the book has two themes: the relationship between the father, Hugo Brenner, and little Greta; and the strange, to many almost unbelievable, and yet so convincing relationship between Brenner and the woman he loved before he was drawn into his fatal marriage — to that woman and her husband.

The relationship between Brenner and his child has been made clear by the new psychology. Freud or Jung would probably talk of Greta as suffering from an "Electra complex." Reading the book, you feel that Geijerstam has told the

truth, and that the truth could not be otherwise. Recognizing this truth, you realize, too, that Freud and Jung must be right. Through the shock given to the child's mind at its most receptive period, when understanding had just begun to develop, and through the solace found in the father's passionate love, the little girl's affections have become prematurely developed and set so sharply in direction of the father that, were she to live a hundred years, there would be no place for any other love in her heart. It is one of the sweetest and tenderest and saddest stories I have ever read. The devotion and the jealousy of that child heart, with its wild craving to make good what the mother broke, are equally touching and equally convincing. One reads of it with a gasp, as one tries to picture the inevitable future. And when death mercifully steps in and solves the problem, one feels a relief that no so-called happy ending could bring — because one feels that any other ending of that childish romance would have been either impossible or unendurably tragic.

The relationship of Elise and Karl Bohrn to each other and to Hugo Brenner embodies an unusually audacious conception of emotional possibilities, but one which, however improbable it may seem, should need no apologies in the light of what we are gradually discovering about ourselves. Should any defense be required, it will be

found in Geijerstam's immaculately delicate treatment of the matter. There can be no doubt about the extent or intensity of the love which man and wife harbor for each other in this strange triangle. Yet Karl Bohrn finds himself irresistibly forced into other relationships whenever the strain of his business becomes uncommonly marked. These relationships are quite temporary. They render him unhappy, but he has learned that resistance is futile. The thought of his wife worries him in particular, but he cannot speak of the matter to her. She knows, and she suffers to some extent, but chiefly because he does not speak to her, and because she is thus prevented from helping him. Elise, on her side, has carried the image of Hugo Brenner in her heart ever since she first met him, and her love for him burns steadily through the years in spite of her unquestionable affection for her husband. In the same way, Brenner has loved her, and continues to love her through anything else that might befall him — and the first time he becomes clearly conscious of the lasting character of this attachment is on his wedding night, when he finds himself alone for the first time in his new home with his little shop girl bride, whose true nature has not yet had time to reveal itself. When he and Elise meet again after years, she at once becomes his friend and support during the time of his heaviest ordeal, when the nature of his wife

irresistibly carries her from bad to worse. And when the crisis comes, Elise becomes as much of a friend to Greta, while the relationship between her and Greta's father remains the same as before: both knowing that they love each other, and neither one breathing a word about it to the other. But when the girl is dead, and when Hugo Brenner comes, a broken man, to seek consolation with his two friends, then the situation suddenly changes: both he and Elise speak, but openly, in the presence of Karl Bohrn, and from that day Elise holds back nothing from her lover, while her marriage continues happily as before. It is of little use to discuss whether such a relationship between three people be desirable or possible. Were the author alive, he might answer that he had taken his facts out of life. The story of Lord Nelson and the Hamiltons indicates that such things may happen. To me, however, the main thing seems to be that art has many functions, and not the least important one is to serve as an experimental laboratory for life. Therefore, the artist has the right to portray, and we have the duty of considering, any combination of human existences and emotions that can possibly occur to our imaginations. Should the artist overstep the boundaries of the probable or propose solutions unacceptable to life itself, our own reactions will furnish the one rebuke needed. Whether Geijerstam did either in *Woman's Power*

is a question to be decided by each reader for himself.

From 1901, when *Woman's Power* appeared, to his death on March 6, 1909, Geijerstam completed eight more novels and two collections of short stories. Several of these works — especially the novels *Dangerous Forces* and *The Old Manor* and the short story collection named *Forest and Sea* — rank very high in his production, but none of them brought any new note or any achievement more worthy of remark than those already recorded. With *Karin Brandt's Dream* (1904), the first one of his "novels of olden time," he entered a new field, but his general manner of treatment and his outlook on life remained the same as before. Even when, as in *Dangerous Forces,* he begins his story with a description of a labor parade on May 1 and ends it with a few glimpses of the first attempt made by Swedish labor to win political results by means of a general strike, the author remains preoccupied by the relationship between his hero and other human individuals, including his wife, while the social aspects of the story merely serve to furnish certain additional complications needed to get fuller and brighter light on "the forces that corrode the invisible ties between human beings." The title refers to those forces, and not to the awakening workers, although the cover of the second edition of the

novel is adorned by a futuristic presentation of workers with skull-like faces carrying red and black flags.

During the last fourteen years of his life, beginning with the publication of *Medusa's Head*, Geijerstam was one of Sweden's most popular authors. All of his works sold in great numbers, and each new one was eagerly expected by the public. As far back as 1916, *The Book About Little Brother* had reached eighteen editions. His popularity was hardly less great in the other Scandinavian countries, or in Germany, where several serious studies of his work have appeared. So far there has been no sign that his popularity is about to decrease, either in Geijerstam's native country or elsewhere — a fact that seems to furnish Swedish critics with a source of perennial surprise. On the whole, Geijerstam fared no better at the hands of the critics than did Strindberg, although he was as widely liked as the other was hated and feared. Geijerstam was, above all, kindly and affectionate — a man who was hit by a hard word as by a bullet. It is said, and perhaps with some truth, that one of the main contributory causes of his death was the bitter attacks made on him by Strindberg in *Black Flags* and *The Gothic Rooms*. He was a little fussy and a little self-important. There was nothing about his appearance or manner to suggest a great genius. Nor would it be

safe to class him as such. All through life he wrote a little too much with his heart. He was, as one of his critics said, "greedy of emotion," and he let his emotions run away with him quite frequently. He did not condense or polish — no more than did Strindberg, and very often for the same reason: economic necessity. Even in his best works, his sentences are overladen with small words, many of which add nothing to the meaning, while they frequently detract from the lucidity of his thought.

In spite of these and similar admissions, I think he must be granted a higher place in literature than that accorded him by the general trend of Swedish criticism. In his best books, his style has a power and a penetration not frequently surpassed. Imagery was not his strong point, but his works are full of felicitous expressions, as when, in *The Book About Little Brother,* he said that "a ring of dawn outlined the horizon." Even when the individual sentences might fail to stand scrutiny, they merge into a total unity that rarely fails to impress. His story may wander, but when you are through with it, you feel, as a rule, that you know a great deal more about life than you did before reading it. Sincerity and sympathy are never missing in his work, and when he remained within the field particularly his own, he spoke with an authority that seems to have outstripped the

knowledge of the most carping of his critics. Like Strindberg and Ola Hansson — the latter still wholly unknown in the English-speaking world and not yet fully appreciated in his own country — Geijerstam's intuition revealed to him processes within the human mind that only now are being analyzed and charted by science. He was not a philosopher. He had no world-stirring or life-revealing conception of existence in its entirety. But his psychological clairvoyance was remarkable, and the preciseness and acuteness of his observations when dealing with man's most secret impulses make his work worthy of the most careful study. He wrote of women and children with a loving comprehension that has few equals in modern literature; his feeling for the unfortunate everywhere burned within him like a consuming fire — and it was this fire, I think, rather than Strindberg's merciless caricature, that sent him to his grave at the age of fifty-one. His interest in criminals, particularly of a primitive type, may have been morbid, but it was something far raised above curiosity or sensation-mongering. Of this phase of his authorship, he wrote in his novel *Lost in Life:*

"There are human fates which seem so strangely impressive that they incline us to pause in their presence to pray for the absolution of unknown powers. This feeling, more profound than any-

thing called pity, involves both a consciousness of our own better fortune, and of a connection nevertheless existing between us and those fates — a connection that fills us with horror. . . . . I have always felt myself drawn to the kind of people whose lives lie beyond the sphere of ordinary human experience. The reason is that, looking into their fates, I have seemed to stand on the verge of a possibility hiding the answer to that riddle of the sphinx for the solution of which we generally pay with our lives."

Of the book now made available to the English-speaking world I have said little so far, and I do not intend to say much more, as the reader can judge of it for himself. But there is one charge made against it that I wish to speak of in conclusion. It has been called sentimental. Perhaps it is in part, but in this connection I think it wise to recall how often we brand as sentimental what is merely a frank and unsophisticated recognition of certain fundamental emotions touching the core of all life. It is a book in which Geijerstam told the truth as it came to him at the hands of life itself. The validity of that truth has never been questioned so far as I know.

EDWIN BJÖRKMAN.

New York, May 1, 1921

Such let me seem till such I be;
Take not my snow-white dress away!
Soon from this dusk of earth I flee
Up to the glittering lands of day.

There first a little space I rest,
Then wake so glad, to scene so kind;
In earthly robes no longer drest,
This band, this girdle left behind.

And those calm shining sons of morn
They ask not who is maid or boy;
No robes, no garments there are worn,
Our body pure from sin's alloy.

Through little life not much I toiled,
Yet anguish long this heart has wrung,
Untimely woe my blossom spoiled;
Make me again forever young.

From Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister."

(Thomas Carlyle's translation.)

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

ONCE upon a time there was an author who lived happily with his wife and their three children. He was so happy that he did not know it himself, and all the time he was writing books in great numbers about human unhappiness.

It was not in love, however, that his chief happiness lay, or in the joy of fatherhood, which he took with naive complacency, as if it were impossible for parents to get anything but joy out of their children; nor did it lie in the fact that, even after many years of marriage, the rare bird called unbroken youth still remained a permanent guest in his home. His greatest happiness consisted in never having met or known an evil which he did not believe himself strong enough and hale enough to ward off. Adversities had shown their threatening visages from time to time, but only to vanish like passing clouds beyond the horizon, leaving his sky more clear and pure than ever. So he believed at least, and this belief was the reality in which he lived. Against poverty he fought a perennial battle, but so far he had always managed to keep it at bay. There was only one enemy against whom he had never measured his strength, and the name of that enemy was Death. Not the least part of the man's happiness was, perhaps, that for

a long time he never seriously feared that death might overtake himself or those nearest to him.

Moved by this sense of life's richness, our author once wrote a book full of summer sunshine, dealing with his two big boys, their games and pleasures, their adventures and mishaps. The writing of it became a game to him, and harking back to that time, I can hardly grasp that the man of whom I am thinking was myself.

When the book was printed and bound, and when everything was ready for the story to pass out into the wide, wide world, the author took home a few copies of the eagerly expected work. He wrote the name of Olof in one copy, and that of Svante in another, and handed them solemnly to the two sons thus immortalized.

Olof took his book, and so did Svante. This is said to have been the first occasion when Olof, who has a practical nature with no literary tendencies, sat down to read a book of his own free will. I almost believe that he read three whole chapters. Svante, on the other hand, read the whole book through in a single sitting. Then he picked out certain chapters which he liked particularly and read them aloud to any one who cared to listen. In a word, the entire house was full of rejoicing.

But another little boy was running around the rooms at that time. He was Olof's and Svante's

smaller brother; he had long, curly, flaxen hair, and the biggest blue eyes that any little boy ever possessed. His name was Sven, and he was only two years old. He was still a little behind in speaking, but not in understanding.

When Svante read aloud to him, mamma used to ask Sven, "Do you know whom the story tells about?" And when Sven did not know what to answer, mamma would continue, "About your big brothers. Don't you understand that, Nenne?"

Sven was generally called Nenne, you see, and the name was his own invention because he could not pronounce the letter s.

"The book's names aren't brothers'," Nenne objected.

"Stupid!" said Olof. "That's just the way he calls us."

Then Nenne understood and asked, his eyes burning with impatience, "Anything about Nenne?"

At that moment papa came out of his own room, picked up his pet and raised him to the ceiling. Putting him down again, he said: "What could there be about a little chap that never did a thing in his life yet?"

Sven persisted nevertheless. He used his big blue eyes to the best possible advantage. He poured out kisses with his little red mouth. He fought

with every weapon at his disposal. He must have a book all to himself.

"But Nenne can't read."

This argument made no impression whatever on Nenne. He ran from room to room, his vivid little face all aglow with eagerness. Olof got a book, and Svante got one. Why should Sven alone be left without?

There was no help for it. The author did not have another copy left, so mamma gave up hers. When her name had been properly erased, papa wrote solemnly on the front cover:

To little Nenne
from Papa.

Then, and then only, was Sven satisfied.

That is to say, he appeared to be satisfied, because he made no more protests. All he did was to read his new book. He could read backwards as well as forwards. Sometimes he held the book upside down. And he read aloud so that the echoes rang through the whole house.

Finally he sat silent a while, thinking hard. Then he started running through the rooms as if he could not reach his goal fast enough. He ran straight to papa's room, where papa himself sat in a cloud of smoke at his writing desk. Making himself so small that he could squeeze in between papa's chair and the desk, he poked up his head and tried to look into papa's face.

"What is it, Sven?" said papa, who didn't like to be disturbed.

Sven would not give in until the chair was pushed back so that he could get up between papa's knees. Looking up at papa's face, he said gently but firmly, "Papa write book Nenne only."

"What?"

"Papa write book Nenne only," the little fellow repeated, raising his voice a little higher on each word.

Then papa understood.

It had hurt Little Brother not to be included in the book. Small as he was, he had his own claim to justice. Small as he was, he thought, perhaps, that he had as large a claim on papa as the other boys. Small as he was, he knew that there must be a place for him wherever papa, mamma, and his brothers were. He looked at papa with big questioning eyes, and he was as eager as if it had been a case of life or death.

Papa also took the matter very seriously, and answered, "I promise to write a book some time about you, too."

"Nenne only," persisted Little Brother, thereby clearly indicating the main point of his request.

"Nenne only," replied papa earnestly. Right is right, you know!

Little Brother ran off, yelling out the news as

far as the kitchen. In that moment his rehabilitation was complete.

Nor did he fail to keep papa reminded of his promise. But an author has so much to write about. He cannot sit down any minute to write about a little golden-haired chap who has done nothing in life but run around making everybody feel happy. In poetry as in life, the small ones must wait because the big ones will not let them by until their turn comes.

That is the reason why Little Brother had to wait until now for his book. To-day I am another man, and everything about me is changed. Little Brother did not know what he asked of me — no more than I knew what I promised.

But at my ear I hear a voice that compels me to keep my promise.

THE BOOK ABOUT LITTLE BROTHER

PART I

PART ONE

Chapter I

THIS whole book is a book about death, and yet it seems to me to deal with happiness rather than unhappiness. It is not unhappiness to lose what you love, but to spoil it and defile it. There is another secret for the mastery of which I had to live a long time. Love never stands still. It must either grow with the passing years, or decrease. And it is not in the latter case alone that suffering comes. Mightiest of all is Eros when he brings suffering because of his constantly increasing strength.

But I must begin from the beginning and tell everything that is to be written in this book as one tells a dream. And strange as it may seem to the reader, it is all part of the book Little Brother asked me for.

Have I dreamed that I loved, married, and begot children? Have I dreamed that I was unspeakably happy and unspeakably unhappy? Have I been dreaming? Or have I really lived through what seems a mere reminiscence of some other human life projected within my horizon? It seems to me now as if, in some incomprehensible manner, I had come to stand — not above; oh, no, anything but above — but rather beyond it all. And

the only thing reaching me now is a note of worship so ineffable that not even music could grasp it and give it tangible expression. Yes, it seems to me as if I might hope that, some day, when I have written down what is now groping its way toward the unwritten sheets in order to become a book perhaps, the story itself will give me the key to the riddle that is now plaguing and worrying me—that it will tell me what in my life was dream, and what reality.

I am not weighed down by sorrow alone, you see, but also by wonder at what happened, the selfsame wonder that stirs at the bottom of all conscious life. . . . .

At this moment I recall coming into my wife's room one evening and finding her brooding over a book that lay open before her. She was reading it, and her face expressed dissatisfaction.

I leaned over her shoulder and saw that she was reading the Bible. The open pages contained a chapter of Genesis. In answer to my question what she was reading, she merely pointed to a couple of lines which I still seem able to see at the bottom of the page. And I read these words: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake . . . . In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children. . . . ."

"It is horrid," she said. "I can't recall whether I bore my children in pain. I have never given a thought to it."

She rose and went over to a little bed that stood crosswise behind our own beds. She bent down over the round and rosy face of a child that slept and gurgled with lips moving as if it were at its mother's breast.

"Did I bear you in pain?" she said, as if speaking to herself. "No, in happiness I bore you . . . . in happiness and jubilation . . . . a happiness so namelessly great that I did not realize it until now."

She pulled me down beside herself on the sofa, put her head on my shoulder, and curled up within my arms as if seeking protection against the whole world's heaviness and sorrow. Without changing her position, she reached out her hand and closed the book.

"It is a stupid book," she said. "I have never been able to understand it."

"I should not call it stupid," I said with a smile.

"That's what you yourself have called it," she said, raising herself a little.

"I? Never!"

"Well, then you called it something else." She settled back again.

"I don't remember. I only know that I wish to think like you, to believe like you, to be like you, because there is no one else like you in the world."

Such words no man can answer. It is not necessary to deprecate them, because they are not meant

as a burnt-offering to one's conceit. They come like caresses, as when a man looks upon his wife and says, "To me there is no woman but you." For that very reason my wife continued after a pause so brief that I hardly noticed it.

"I never thanked you, I think," she said, "for teaching me to believe as you do, but I am glad you did. You can not feel it as I do. You can never have the same feeling. Every passing day makes me richer. Every hour seems full of my own happiness. It seems so strange to think now, that once, when I was younger, I longed for death in order to reach heaven. What did I have in mind then? What did I long for? It seems I have forgotten it as if it had never happened. The only thing that appeared heavy for a while was the thought of not seeing my dead father again. But now I don't seem to ask anything but to live with the boys and you. I cannot even wish that there be any other life than the one you and I are permitted to live together. I wish to live with you until the boys grow up and go out into the world. Then we shall grow old together, you and I, and beyond that I cannot think."

"Don't you believe in any possibility of another life?" I rejoined.

She shook her head energetically. "No," she burst out. "I want nothing but what is. Some time I shall want to be put to sleep in the ground, under

a beautiful, flowery mound. To me that is all there is, and for that I pray to the Lord every night."

She prayed to the Lord every night, and she did not believe in immortality! I knew it, and once more I sensed the wonder of her own particular riddle, which to her was nothing but matter-of-fact reality. I patted her shoulder to let her know that I had heard and understood.

Then she asked with a sudden transition of thought, "Do you believe anything else?"

"I neither believe nor disbelieve."

She repeated my words tonelessly, although she had heard them many times. She repeated them as if they implied something quite incomprehensible. Suddenly she burst out, "Then you have changed your mind."

"I don't think so."

"Yes, you have. If not, how could I believe that life ended with death? It was you who taught me. Why can you no longer believe as I do?"

As she spoke, a memory flitted across my mind. I saw her and myself walking under the bright birches on one of the islands outside of Stockholm. The stars of heaven were twinkling above us, and in the grass at our feet glimmered faint reflections of the light in the windows of our first summer home. It seemed that I could still hear the words whispered between us in the stillness of the night:

words about life and death, about God and the hereafter; words that drew depth and passion from the intoxication of our first love. I remember that she asked questions and I answered. I remember that she became deeply depressed and silent while she pondered my answers. And now, when this memory flashed across my soul with a vividness that words cannot express, it seemed to me that what I said then must have struck her in a manner not really intended by me, and a pang shot through my heart as if, involuntarily, I had done her some harm.

She interrupted me by saying: "I cannot grasp what it is neither to believe nor disbelieve. I must do one thing or the other."

The tone of her words seemed to beg me not to contradict her, and I did not. I kept within myself the mood of that bright island of our youth, wondering all the while that I could see the stars through the leafage of the birches.

My wife rose while we were talking and stood again beside the little bed. In the midst of our talk she had noticed that the boy stirred. She picked him up, closing her arms about him in the quiet, protective way of which mothers alone are capable, and placed him at her breast. Her face shone, as she looked at him and felt him drinking her milk, with the indescribable confidence that is

the soil out of which springs the sense of community between mother and child.

What we had just talked of and what I now saw, mingled strangely and became as one in my feeling, while I recalled the words that had started our brief conversation. I sat a long while thinking of what to say. I thought of the cruel words: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake;" and of the words added about the poor ground itself: "Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth." The feeling of what I had and what I saw before me overwhelmed me to such an extent, that I was afraid to speak lest I betray my emotion by tears. At the same time I tried to keep my own thoughts from shaping themselves into words, lest I appear affected to my wife.

At last I picked up the Bible and put it aside. "You are right," I said. "The harsh words are wrong. It should read: 'Blessed is the ground for thy sake. Grapes and roses shall it bring forth.'"

And having said this, I kneeled down and placed my head so that it touched my wife and my child at the same time. With her free hand she patted my hair.

Ah! We were young then — young and very happy.

Chapter II

I HAVE not mentioned my wife's name so far, and I still find it hard to do so. In my thoughts I sometimes name her Mignon, because it is the only name that enables me to see her as she came and went. And for that matter, how can I know whether I am now painting herself or the memory she left behind? Can a woman be what she seems to those who have never seen her as perhaps only one person is capable of seeing her? Is not her innermost being made up of the very essence that remains when all that is superficial and accidental has faded away? Is it not possible that what many call an idealization is the real innermost likeness — that it is what, in a world not reached by human vision, will become our real self, and as such visible to all?

She was small and slight of stature. The first time I saw her was on the street, when we were casually introduced to each other in the light of a street lamp. After we had parted, I retained the memory of a pair of wonderfully large and deep eyes. Otherwise I recalled nothing but a neckpiece of black fur, a pair of long black gloves, and the pressure of a hand that carried with it a sudden, strong sense of sincerity, alertness, and truthfulness. Otherwise I recalled so little of her appear-

ance that I passed her on the street a few days later without recognizing her. Yet I had no peace on account of those eyes. They returned again and again in my imagination, luminous and sorrowful, fraught with something that was at once greed of life and reverence. If ever a pair of eyes mirrored a soul, hers did.

As I think of all I have experienced through my wife, I know that, during all the motley years of my life, no one did more than she to preserve my religious feelings; and yet I don't think I ever heard her mention the word religion, and it would probably have been possible to fool her into confusing Abraham and the Apostle Paul. But all that found a place in her thoughts or feelings became sacred to her in some peculiar way. Her being was all tenderness, and the life she craved to live was a feast — a feast at which her sense of the worth and sanctity of life could bear no dissonance. But all that was strong and vital within her, was also frail and fragile. There dwelt at the bottom of her soul a passion for completeness that could not brook life because it seemed to rest on a higher plane than life itself.

We had been married many years when, one day, she said to me in the sudden, casual, seemingly irrelevant manner that characterized all her most deeply felt utterances: "You must never, never let me feel that anything between you and

me has become old and accustomed. The day that happens I shall die."

Many women have said the same thing, and many have lived to laugh at their own words. But I remember having heard of a woman who said to a man: "Don't you think there may be a few women who really feel what all women say?"

This question came to my mind at my wife's words, and in recognition of the truth behind them, I merely pressed her hand. I understood that what she said represented her most profound conviction, and I knew that in this case the thought of sentimentality was out of place. But I could also see that she looked to me for a word in response that would have real meaning, and so I said: "Don't you think there are things that may become old and accustomed without losing in strength or joy or sacredness?"

She looked at me with big eyes as if she wished to look straight to the bottom of my soul. Then she came up to me and kissed me, and I saw that her eyes were dim, and I felt her whole being surge toward mine in a burst of tenderness. "Let it become old and accustomed then," she said. "I long for it."

Not another word was spoken. But all that day I could see that she was full of quiet, silent jubilation. The same afternoon she was in the garden, and through my open window I could hear her

singing to herself — singing in a rich voice, clear as a bell.

A little later she came in to me with an artfully composed nosegay of meadow flowers, where all the bloom of summer mingled harmoniously as did the notes of her song. Without a word she put it on my table, smiling silently in order not to disturb my work. Then she sat down at the other end of the room, and as I wrote I glanced up from time to time just for the sake of looking at her. The evening sun was shining on her dark hair and brightening the colors of her face, which always seemed new and never the same.

Chapter III

NOTHING ever became old and commonplace between us. I know that this is a big thing to say. But it is true. And for that reason I still can declare: "Blessed be life and all it gave!" To bless life for what it took is still beyond me.

It happened instead that sorrow came into our house, and now I know that it might have parted us because I was unable to feel this sorrow as she did. But I realize with humble gratitude that it never went so far. Yet had human power been able to bring it about, even that would have befallen.

I don't know how soon I saw what was happening, but I know that the impression of it is so deeply interwoven with the memory of my wife that I cannot comprehend my ever seeing her in the light of youth and happiness alone. Her health began to fail early in life. Indeed, I never knew her to be without the seeds of illness. How could I nevertheless, up to the very last, for long periods at a time, forget that her health was undermined, and that those seeds of illness must either develop or disappear? I knew only too well that they did not disappear. And yet I never learned to look upon her life as a journey toward death in a sense quite different from the usual one. Did I pay no

heed to the warnings that appeared? Did I close my eyes and ears to the forebodings that flared up within me from time to time, like spontaneous combustions threatening the structure of my happiness, which I had thought so safely founded? I don't know if such was the case. All I know is, that I was so young when I married that I believed love an antidote for all the ills of the world. When I beheld Elsa bright and happy, when we were together in the woods and on the water, when I saw her tanned by the sun and her white limbs washed by the summery waves, then I forgot that calamity was possible, and I persuaded myself that my fears were so many fancies. Alas! in the end I was so practiced in the art of forgetting, that I did not want to see. And I dreamt of health and long life even when Elsa had been so close to death that her escape was a miracle; when, under her dress, she carried the scars of the surgeon's knife; when she was always on guard against pain, never quite free from it, forgetting it by sheer self-subjugation in order that she might bring gladness and the enjoyment of life to those she loved, to her children and to me.

I remember, however, how very early I perceived this something that made our marriage a long, fluctuating struggle to forget. I perceived it in her face when she was alone and believed herself unobserved; and when I first saw it, I thought

there must be something amiss between her and me. I used to ask her about it, and it is hard to tell whether it was my love or my conceit which made me believe that nothing unrelated to myself could possibly disturb her happiness. I saw that my questions caused her inexpressible misery, and yet I questioned her. On such occasions she used to smile with an expression as if her soul had been far away—an expression I cannot recall without pain, because for years I fought to conquer it, while in the end it got the upper hand and conquered me.

"You must not ask me," she said once. "I don't know myself what it is. All I know is that no one can understand it."

The depths into which she was looking on such occasions belong to the unknown, concerning which all may question without ever getting an answer. But how was it possible for me to understand all this? Our life was happy. Our days were joyous. Our boys were growing bigger and filled our home with their merry clamor. And Elsa was never more tender toward me than after I had noticed one of those moments of silent sadness, which I might properly have called unreasonable if there were no other reasons than those that can be expressed in words by human beings.

Chapter IV

BY this time our eldest children had grown into big boys. Olof was already attending school, and in a brief time Svante, too, would have to try his teeth on the hard nuts of the tree of knowledge.

It was about this period that the dark hours for the first time began to get the better of my wife, so that more than once I could see that she had wept. She avoided me in her own quiet way, and she did it on such occasions in order to prevent me from asking questions. I can never forget the anguish that mastered me during this time. It slipped into the room at night when I sat alone at my writing desk. It accompanied me when I went to our bedroom for rest. In the darkness it remained beside my bed while I lay awake listening to my wife's breathing in order to tell whether she was asleep.

There was silence between us during those days —a peculiar silence. We would enter our living room and light the lamp, and there we might sit without a word and feel the silence rise like a wall between us—a wall that no one had built, and no one could tear down. And if our hands went in search of each other, it was only because they must, and because neither one of us could endure being

away from the other, although both could feel the distance.

Then the boys came in to say good-night. We kissed both of them, and we kept looking after them when they left. But not a word was spoken, and when I turned my head toward my wife again, I could feel that she was weeping, although I heard nothing. Neither of us could have been more unhappy if one or both of us had harbored some dark secret, and yet both of us knew that there was nothing of the kind.

"Are you unhappy with me, Elsa?" I would ask.

And in response I heard her sob as if moved by profound agony, "Do you think I could live if I didn't have you?"

Chapter V

I CANNOT tell exactly how long this period lasted. I know only that I recall it as a protracted, horrible winter without snow — a long dark gap in our life, which seemed empty and meaningless. Since then I have seen my most precious possession snatched out of my arms by death. I have seen friends die. I have felt myself isolated in regard to everything for which I was willing to live or die spiritually. But I have never experienced anything comparable to that winter, because then I believed that Elsa was slipping away from me, and because this thought was worse to me than anything that could have befallen me at the hands of other human beings, or even at the hands of life itself.

This season became so bitter because it was the only one in my life that hardened my heart against her, and this happened because I didn't understand. In the end I withdrew within my own self, as did she, for I was overpowered by resentment. At length this resentment found utterance, and the air about us quivered with hard words.

One day I surprised her in tears, and with a voice no longer my own, I broke out, "How long do you think I can stand this?"

My words were no sooner spoken than re-

gretted, and I shall never forget the expression of fear that seemed to turn her whole face into stone.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"What I say."

It was as if an evil spirit had spoken through my mouth, and I could not check it. All that I had suffered rose within me as if to choke me, and I felt it a triumph to be able to hurt her.

"Go, then," she said. "Go away from me. Why did you ever come near me?"

She was not crying when she left. But through my very anger I felt that my unpremeditated words had caused her greater pain than I had ever experienced or could possibly experience. Yet I shook off this idea and fortified myself behind the narrow pride that makes us seek the author of a wrong rather than its prevention.

"It is her fault if our happiness goes to pieces," I said to myself. "What have I done that she should be unhappy and torture me without telling me the cause? She does not love me any longer. It is the way of life. What is beautiful must be defiled. He who has happiness will not be permitted to retain it."

Behind such thoughts I hid my real feelings, which all the time were full of her. I believed my anger warranted, and I thought that my words had received a far harsher answer than they deserved.

It was the story of the bygone days of Eden.

Chapter VI

IT WAS the only time when our happiness really was at stake, and I believe that both of us felt equally strongly that sinister powers had played havoc with our lives. One whole day passed without a word being exchanged between us. That evening, as we were about to retire, we fell into each other's arms and wept without being able to speak.

After that everything was as before. Still the question burning within me — what is it? what can it be? — remained unanswered. I was more calm, however, and suffered remorse over my unspoken thoughts, while at the same time I seemed to be expecting some sort of solution.

Two days later I found a letter on my table.

I remember breaking it with a sense of anguish as if the paper might reveal some secret that would have the power of crushing my whole life. At the same time I was on fire with a craving to have my question answered: "Why is she not happy? Is it possible to be happy and unhappy at the same moment?"

The letter read as follows:

My own beloved: How could such words be spoken between you and me? How could it possibly happen? My first impression was that the sun

had been extinguished and that I should never see daylight again. And I brooded and brooded how to make you good to me again, and how to make all this seem as if it had never happened.

But then I saw that, in spite of all, you were good in your heart, although it didn't seem so, and I began to understand that you never could be anything else, and that it was only my inability to answer your questions that filled you with conflict and bitterness, so that you struck blindly without knowing that you might hurt me as you did. Even now I don't know how to answer you, but you must not think it queer that I write. I do so merely because, if I tried to speak *this,* I should never be able to say more than half of what I wanted.

There is much within me, George, very much, that I shall never speak out, either to you or to any one else, because I know that I shall never be able to say it. I have always been like that, George, and I shall remain like that, I suppose.

Sometimes when I think of how you are to me, how you tell everything, and never keep a secret nook in your heart, then I feel myself a mere echo of you, and I feel so poor that I have nothing to give you in return. But when you tell me that this is not true, then I feel happy, George, very happy and very rich. And I know that I have given you all that I can give and all that I have.

But when you notice that I sit gazing into my

own self, as you put it, then you must know that I do nothing but what I always have done, even when most happy, and long before I knew you, and my real life began. And if I weep, you must not think that I am unhappy. What I think of then does not make me unhappy. It is only something over which I must brood at times because I know, and have always known, that it has to come.

But don't ask me about it, for I can't answer you. If I could, oh, if I could do that, then my tears would cease at once. Perhaps it is nothing at all. Perhaps it means only that I am too happy.

But I want you to believe me when I tell you, that you need never fear that there is anything secret and hidden in my soul which I hide and keep secret because you should not see it. I cannot show it: that is all.

Therefore, don't ask me to speak, but love me as I am. Love me as your little girl, and your friend, who asks for nothing but to walk beside you as long as God permits her to live, and then to die and sleep in peace, forgotten by all but you. You must never forget me, and that is the only "immortality" I ask.

One thing I sometimes desire. It is, that you and I were old and grey, and that our children were quite grown up. I am the mother to such a degree that I wish my boys were grown up, so that I might visit their homes and take their small,

small, really small and helpless children in my arms and see that there was a little of my own life in them, too. My boys are so big now that soon they won't need me any longer. But it would be so nice to be old and to spend the time with you waiting for the day that is to bring the long rest. It seems that I might love you twice as much if you were old and grey, so that no one else could see you as I do, and so that I might think that no one else really knew who you were, because no one else had ever owned you.

Now I have told you a great many things, and yet not what you asked me to tell. But do not think of it, George. Think only that I love you now as I have always done, and that what I feel for you now is more than words can express, more than you yourself can ever grasp. My place is here with you, and I have everything that any woman ever had or ever can get, no matter how happy she might be. Don't believe anything else, because if you do, you will make me more unhappy than you can imagine or believe.

YOUR WIFE.

Chapter VII

I SAT long with this letter in my hand. The wave of tenderness sweeping over me was so tremendous that it drowned all questions, and caused me to wander about in my accustomed surroundings, where nothing seemed changed or was changed, feeling myself far and above the fairy-tale prince who was carried on the wings of the west wind to the Island of the Blessed.

I had asked why my wife seemed so changed, and I had not been told. I had merely received a new proof of her devotion; and such is love, that it wants nothing but itself, and all the questions it may ask besides have no other aim than the certainty without which it cannot exist. This little letter, therefore, gave us the key to everything, without explaining anything; and having read it, I went to my wife full of dumb gratitude, quite happy because my faith was restored.

Nor did we speak very much about the letter, but both felt a great relief that it had been written, and at night we stayed up much longer after the children had gone to bed. I remember how Elsa sang during the time that followed — sang as she never sang in the presence of any one but me. I sat there and let my soul be caressed by her notes, wondering all the time how any misunderstanding

could possibly have slipped in between her and me.

I don't know how the days passed. I didn't notice that they grew longer, that drops fell from the icicles under the eaves, and that the trees in the neighboring park were budding. I rather regretted that the winter could not last longer, so that the lamp might be lighted early and our evenings together begin.

"Have you noticed," my wife asked one morning, "that I am in better spirits than I was, and that I never cry any more?"

I had noticed. But with the ingratitude of a man who has escaped an unknown danger, I had enjoyed the change without giving any thought to it. "Perhaps you cry instead when no one is looking," I answered, and I could feel a touch of my old distrust awakened within me.

My wife never noticed it. She stood before me radiantly young, as if no cloud had ever thrown its shadow on her brow. Upon her lips played a smile which I seemed to have seen before, but I could not remember when.

"I cry no longer," she said. And her voice carried something like a challenge when she added, "That, *too,* is one of my secrets."

I caught her mood without understanding her words. I was satisfied and made happy by a feeling that life again was smiling and gamboling before us.

This entire period left no other trace on our common life than to make it a little more intimate and more careful, so to speak, than it had ever been before. I no longer can tell how I tried to explain to myself this queer parenthesis in a happy marriage. I certainly did not guess at the time that it contained the seed of my entire future tragedy.

Chapter VIII

ALTHOUGH she proudly named herself the mother of two boys, Elsa was still young. As she passed up the avenue on her husband's arm, there was a swing in her step, and while she walked, she drew close to me with a movement showing that, if anything weighed upon her pretty head, it was not age.

It was one of those dangerous spring evenings in Stockholm, when the sun shines tenderly on newly budded trees, when the streets are full of people who seem to be at play or to be part of a show, when the wayside inns tempt old married people into playing newly wedded or engaged, when the sky is blue and the ice cakes dance down the river, when the winter seems as far off as if it could never return, and when the spring promises a summer such as never was before.

It was on just such an evening that Elsa lured her husband into walking to a little inn far out in the country, telephoning home not to wait dinner, and arranging a little supper for two in a small room with white curtains, from which they could see the evening sunlight fall between long shadows upon trees with pale green leaves.

This was one of our favorite pleasures; and the more rarely we dared to enjoy it, because the chil-

dren were growing up and could not be left alone, the more we treasured it on such an evening, fraught with the merriment and the romance that are common food to youth, but to age a feast to be cherished in memory.

I recall Elsa particularly well as she was this evening.

Her hunger stilled, she curled herself contentedly in a corner of the sofa, sipping at her last glass of champagne. She resembled a kitten expecting to be patted or played with. I sat opposite her, reverently smoking a good cigar while I let my eyes follow the sunbeams playing among the shadows of the trees. I felt happy and satisfied, but I had worked very hard of late, and I sensed it almost as a disturbance that my wife longed to see me surrender to her own mood. She was feverishly excited. She looked as if she wanted to run about the room in romping play, only to let herself be captured by me; as if she longed for something new and unusual; as if she were overflowing with that girlish desire for the immortal nonsense of bliss which was one of the things in her that I loved most. But I could not let myself go, no matter how much I wished to. It was as if some evil foreboding or some irresistible melancholy was lurking within me and keeping me from a wholehearted share in the flight of her feelings. Sometimes you remember such things afterwards,

and you accuse yourself of your neglect as if you had committed a crime. I still recall that I grasped her mood at the time, and what followed showed me the path her dreams were treading.

A little depressed because, contrary to custom, our feelings would not move to a common rhythm, she sat silently enjoying the final glass of champagne, and while thus occupied, her frolicsome thoughts slipped into a mood of gentle dreaminess. Gazing at her husband, whose hair already was quite grey at the temples, she saw in her dream that day of many years ago when both of us were being rowed toward a sunlit island, where, behind the trees, we could glimpse our first cheerful summer home. She looked and looked. The picture became so clear and concise that she imagined herself able to distinguish every shrub and tree, everything, including even the subtle play of light and shadow traced by the evening sunlight on the shingled roof of the grey cottage. She saw the bay spreading out into a blue immensity, but where it closed in about the island, its wavelets were rocking reflections of luminous birches, and of dark oaks and spruces that seemed almost black in the water.

She has often told me about the vividness of these visionary reminiscences that were so characteristic of her. And I have a clearer and more waking view of her dream now than I had then.

Beyond all doubt she saw these things; her frolicsome mood vanished, and I could see her eyes brimming with hot tears. With a quick movement she emptied what remained in her glass, slid down from the sofa, and leaned her head against my knees.

As if directly affected by her feeling, or as if our thoughts had met in the past, when life's dream of happiness embraced us both, I, too, was captured by a wholly different mood. Putting my arm quietly about her neck and patting her cheek, I said: "What are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking of our first summer."

At that moment it seemed to me that I had been thinking of the same thing. All my fatigue was blown away. Full of emotion, I raised her head to me and kissed her on the mouth.

In a trice Elsa sat up straight.

For a moment the craving after something new and unusual, that could break up the monotony of commonplaceness, mixed in her memory with what had been; and with a ring in her voice that could not be resisted, she broke out, "I want to go there, George! I want to go there!"

The same moment brought me back to reality. At bottom, my own mood was perhaps identical with that of my wife. But at the same time I experienced the peculiar sense of impending disappointment that rises within us to check our dreams in

life's most overwrought moments. I shrank from this attempt to bring youth back to life as if I feared instead to encounter some grief that I wished to avoid at any price. I felt so sure of disillusionment, that my wife's innocent project — the little journey toward the open sea, the visit to the place where I knew every inlet, every strait, even the stones along the bottom of the bay — seemed to involve something so important and decisive that I should have to consider well before I formed such a fateful resolution. Yet I perceived also that the mere thought of it filled my wife with an exultation so great that I could not say no. Therefore I said yes, and closed her in my arms to hide my own dejection.

As we walked homeward later, a glimmer of youth pervaded Elsa's entire being. Of what I really felt, she had noticed nothing. As if she had been aware of walking toward some great happiness, her features were radiant and reflected in all its fullness the vivid feeling with which she united what had been with what was. At the thought that my sad forebodings might prove correct, such a pang of agony shot through me that I could not restrain my thoughts.

"Are you sure that everything will be as you expect?" I asked.

She winced, and the expression on her face was

almost angry when she answered, "Why must you always spoil things for me?"

"Do I really do that?"

Her good humor returned at once. "No," she said. "But I felt so happy just now."

I kept silent and merely drew her closer to myself. Her faith made me forget my own misgivings, and in my fancy our insignificant little trip assumed strange proportions, as when small neighboring islands rise above the horizon with the fantastic glamour of a mirage.

Chapter IX

ONE Sunday morning we sat at last on the deck of the steamer puffing its way toward our destination.

Years had gone by during which we had never travelled this route — years that had brought good and evil; years that had sundered and united. Our thoughts had followed separate paths, but now they met again. United in a peculiar mystic feeling that seemed to defy fate, we sat side by side, while place after place passed by, illuminated by the bright spring sun and laved by glistening blue waters that were rippled by a slight breeze.

My resistance was quite gone. I surrendered completely to my wife's guidance, and I received every impression with an emotion as if I were twelve years younger and on my way to new, unknown goals that would change my humdrum life and open new vistas throughout my existence. My wife seemed rejuvenated like myself. Her face was brightened by a tender blush, and her eyes radiated the light that springs from happiness. Her voice carried a note of indefinable tenderness that caressed me with the whole force of the illusion that filled us both. Between us passed smiles and words, glances and gestures, that usually belong only to the initial period of love.

After we had landed at last and had stood alone on the pier watching the receding smoke of the steamer, we put our arms around each other and walked slowly along the road that turned and twisted between newly budded hazels and tall gnarled oaks on whose branches spring had not yet made any impression. It was only then we noticed how far behind was all vegetation. The sea presses those islands to its cold bosom, surrounding every reef and rock and islet with an icy atmosphere that retards the work of spring. The landscape was not green as it was farther inland, where groves and meadows bring forth their leaves under the protection of those outer islands that meet and repulse the harsh northern winds. Everything here was bare and cold. On the branches of the trees appeared nothing but feeble, faintly green buds with touches of yellow and brown. The sallows bore catkins. The grass slept under dead leaves. The anemones, which already were past farther inland, here spread their white and blue blossoms beneath the branches of the hazels.

This very backwardness of nature filled us both with a new happiness as if we had been bewitched by our own mood.

"Do you see that everything is behind as it was then?"

"Don't you remember that by coming out here you get a second spring?"

And we let our glances measure the wide sheet of water lapping this scene of belated spring. It gladdened us to watch the gulls, as of old, floating in wide curves over the blue waters. We rejoiced in their white wings glistening in the sunlight, and we stopped to watch their unfettered play as they shot through the air and struck the water where their bright eyes had spied some prey.

Hand in hand, like two children, we wandered up the slope to a little red house, and we exchanged glances that seemed full of secret confidences when the same customs guard with a fringe of grey whiskers, who used to row for us before, came to the door and promised to take us over to the island of our youth.

The journey across the blue waters passed in silence. Without a word, filled with the strange mood that had mastered us both, and that seemed to expand and increase with every newly opened vista, we sat with hands joined and let the memories flow through us, fully conscious that each one knew the other's thoughts. Never before had that journey seemed so wonderful. Never before had we seen the midday sun in such alluring glory. Never before had the luminous waters and the leafy shores mingled so harmoniously with the sombre background of spruce forests. And as we

approached the little island, it seemed that every rock and tree and grove rose not out of the diminishing distance, but out of our own memories that surpassed reality in faithful preservation of the surroundings out of which had sprung the happiness of our entire existence.

But once ashore, both of us stopped still, and a cry of joy already hovering on Elsa's lips froze into silence. Silently we stared at each other. Depressed by something new and unexpected, which we dared not recognize, we walked slowly along the narrow path leading away from the point where we had landed.

What we saw was that the house standing on the island had ceased to be grey. It was red. It was no longer a spacious two-story house, but a low cottage which looked as if the poverty and distress of passing years had forced it to make itself as small as possible on the site of our former home. For a while we stood silent as if trying to recover our breath.

"George," said Elsa, "what is this?"

I had only to point at the old oaks around the house. Their branches showed black scars and their trunks were scorched. I pointed to the foundation of stone blackened by soot, to the little garden plot all torn up, and to a pile of old lumber still left in front of the house. The wood was burned and charred, decayed and broken to

pieces. This was all that remained of our former home.

"There has been a fire," I said. And my voice trembled.

"Ruins."

As if we had both felt our solidarity with this spot of the earth, which we had not seen for many years, we were captured by a new interest — to learn what had happened, what had changed our island of bliss and rendered it all but unrecognizable. This interest seemed to brush away the world of dreams that had held us captive so far. It enlarged the realm of our emotions until it included the lives of those that had lived and suffered, toiled and struggled in this place — lives that time had moulded and modeled so harshly that no dreams of bliss retained the power of gilding the hard reality.

At that moment, when our thoughts turned to the people whom until then we had remembered only as a necessary appendage to our own happiness, the door of the cottage opened. A crooked old woman stepped into the sunlight pouring down on the threshold and greeted the visitors with a smile of recognition. She looked as old as if she had come straight out of some ancient fairy tale. She leaned on a stick, and her wrinkled face showed the twinges of familiar pain when she moved her rheumatic body.

"It looks different from what it did when you were here before," the old woman said.

Moving laboriously forward a little, she disclosed her old husband, who, as usual, waited behind her until his turn should come. The old people greeted the two who had dreamed themselves young a moment ago. The old man rubbed his hands, coughed, and muttered unintelligible words as he moved slowly and stolidly from the threshold to make place for the visitors, whom the old woman had just invited into the house.

Through the skeleton of an unfinished porch we visitors gazed out over the widespread waters known to our youth. The garden was neglected. The whole house, although new, seemed to be falling to pieces. Grass covered the paths along which we used to walk. The table and the benches in the little bower by the shore were rotting away because no one repaired what time and weather destroyed.

Without any questioning on our part, the two old people told us how misfortune had overtaken them. The old woman did the telling, and the old man repeated her words in confirmation. Misfortune had come so treacherously and unexpectedly that there was no chance for resistance or for aid.

The fire broke out one spring day in March, when the north wind was blowing briskly and the

ice between the islands was too weak to bear and too strong to break. And because of this state of the ice, the neighbors on the mainland had to look on without being able to help. The two old people, all by themselves, carried what they could save out of the burning house, and then stood helplessly looking on as their home was reduced to ashes. Those ashes, which they watched until the last spark was extinguished, represented the extinction of their last hopes of a carefree old age. Lowly was the hut which, after long years, they raised on the foundations of the old one. The furniture was poor. The surroundings were miserable. And they themselves were broken and tired. A single day of bad luck had taken all that the previous years had built up.

As if weighed down by the same fate, we two who had dreamed ourselves young a moment ago, sat listening to the slow, spare words with which the old people described the fire that laid waste their home. The touchingly matter-of-fact character of this story, interrupted by meaningless details, and mixed with poor people's reminiscences of lost property, did as much as anything to crush the visitors. Thus the glamour of illusion was stripped from our own dreams and a quiet, romantic melancholy seized us. It seemed almost as if some of the treasures of life which we had stored up and thought safe in our possession, had been

burned and destroyed on this little island by the open sea, while we, all unknowingly, were living our lives and believing ourselves happy. Elsa had a feeling of having lost more through this fire than the old people, and I saw, as their story progressed, that she had to use great self-control in order not to burst into tears. What did furniture and clothes and household utensils matter? What did it matter that two broken-down people, whose lives were spent, sat brooding over the contrast between past and present in their simple conditions, since the difference was so small anyhow? What did it all matter in comparison with the fact that she should nevermore behold the island of her youth as once she beheld it?

Those were her feelings, and she turned her face toward me, and I had no consolation to offer. I was thinking how wrong I had been in not obeying the behest of my first forebodings and thus saving us from seeing the ruined site of our earliest happiness. But I did not have the heart to say so. Instead I put her arm in mine, and silently we two walked around the island once more.

Our case was that of the children in the fairy tale who went astray in wonderland and returning found that time had left them behind and made everybody else old and tired. In dreamy silence we sat by the shore and gazed across the waters. There everything was as before, and sitting there,

we forgot the new building and the ruin behind us. We remembered only that for three years we had lived by these waters, every summer in a new place. Seized with a desire to continue what we had begun, we decided to go on to our second summer home with its memories of two small red houses near the edge of the woods and its little lawn, where our first boy used to sleep in a white baby carriage under a blue canopy.

We got some one to row us across, and this time we knew that we were going toward a deserted shore. We made some inquiries in advance, and we learned that here, too, the years had made changes eliminating all traces of the past.

A few years earlier an old fisherman and his wife were living on the point where we landed. She died one winter night while a blizzard was raging about the place. When, not long after, the old man's hour struck, the children took over the two houses near the edge of the woods, the boat, and the storehouse by the shore.

But these islands have many tales to tell. One of them is the tale of the two small red houses at the edge of the woods. At the end of the fifty-years lease under which the ground was held, the real owner took it back, and drove the new occupants from hearth and home. And so the two houses were torn down. The lumber was carted away. Now weeds and thistles covered the old

potato beds, and the ground itself looked as if it had also been swept by fire.

The two travellers in search after traces of their youthful happiness stood once more among the wreckage of a ruined home. We seemed to be pursued by ruins. In the throes of a horrible dejection caused by all these broken illusions, Elsa let go my arm and walked across the parched ground to the fence, where the gate had been torn away and only a pair of rusting, twisted hinges remained on the gatepost.

Leaning both arms against the post and giving free rein to the constantly changing stream of emotions that filled her soul, she broke into violent crying. She sobbed as if all the misfortunes of life had been poured upon her head. She repulsed my hand when I wished to pat her. She cried so long that I became impatient and insisted that we must go lest we miss the steamer.

She didn't hear me. Taking me by the shoulders, she said, "You were right. We should never have come here."

Then she confessed that she had been thinking a long time of this journey, that she had desired it for years, and that by some chance — why, she didn't know — she had come to feel that it must be made at this particular moment. It had seemed to her that we must once undertake this journey, and that she could never feel sure of really being happy

until she had seen all these places again as she used to see them in her dreams. She told me of intending, as soon as we arrived, to ask that we settle down in the vicinity for another summer. And she knew that I could not refuse her request. But now, with nothing left of what had once been hers, it seemed as if her hold on life itself had been broken.

I remained silent during this outburst of despair, knowing full well that I was face to face with one of those fancies or dreams which, to a person with a rich emotional life, may literally mean more than existence itself. Personally, I had, of course, been greatly disturbed both by the memories aroused by these places and by the destruction that had overtaken what was once so dear to us. But it never occurred to me to connect this destruction with anything that, in itself, was dear and significant to me. Her outburst of sorrow left me quite perplexed.

I tried the method by which a man usually is able to calm woman's sorrow. I tried caresses. But Elsa pulled her hand away because she saw that my friendliness proffered consolation, which she scorned, instead of the sympathy she sought. Her face took on a reserved, unapproachable expression as if she had staked her whole being on the fancy that ruled her, and would not let herself be moved by anything.

She looked about the torn and disordered lawn, and with a glance dimmed by pity she said, "Poor people!"

Once more she transmuted her own disappointment into pity for the human misfortune of which the vacant site bore witness. Once more we sat down and let our glances stray over the little slope by the edge of the woods that reminded us of a whole summer's untroubled peace. We began to talk. And we tried to make our imaginations reproduce the scenes that preceded all this destruction. The peasant owning the land, we conjectured, went to the young couple who had inherited the place. He informed them curtly that the lease had run out. The fifty years were gone, and the buildings must be torn down. He wanted his land back. And yet this was clearly not to his advantage. It would have been more profitable for him to lease the piece of ground again. But he had noticed the boarders kept by his tenants every summer, and his jealousy had been aroused by the income they derived in this way. The thought that no one should live there had struck roots in his brain with the force of a fixed idea. The ground must belong to him and to no one else.

Then the young occupants had been forced to tear down the buildings, remove them to some other island, and put them up again wherever the rich could be persuaded to grant a little space to

the poor. But when the last boat-load was ready by the pier, rage seized the man. Insisting in turn on what was his right, he grabbed his axe. He cut down the trees on what had been his father's ground. He tore up the berry bushes. He wrenched the gate from its hinges and threw it on top of the load. The last thing he did before he left was to push the stones of the little pier into the water, so that no landing place remained. Then he set sail, delighted with a revenge that left his enemy no gain.

We talked of this, but all the time our own disappointment lurked behind our words and made Elsa tremble.

"Is it we that bring misfortune?" she asked.

I smiled. My wife's remark seemed meaningless and overwrought. "Let us go on to the third place," I said. "There we know that everything remains as it used to be."

But Elsa merely shook her head. Rising suddenly, she said, "I want to take our old walk through the woods."

Without waiting for an answer, she started ahead of me. It was as if her former vivacity had returned; as if, in a moment, she had shaken off the whole weight of other people's sufferings and sorrows; as if she had pushed aside all that kept the land of our memories hidden, all the misery and agony of life that pursued us throughout this

singular day. She led me straight into the woods along a narrow path, where the spruces joined their branches above our heads. The path was soft and easy to follow. All around us the sunlight quivered on damp mosses, revealing vistas of trunks and needle carpets. The path led to a little cove. Near a steep rock it turned into the woods. The trees stood farther apart by the shore, letting the sunlight into an open place where green things had begun to grow.

There Elsa stopped and began to peruse the trunks of the trees. As I watched her, a long slumbering memory woke within me, too — a memory that had been practically forgotten during eleven years.

It happened one evening while we were still living in those houses which since then had been razed. It was an August night. Following the same path, we had come here to say farewell to a pleasant summer. Then my wife took a black pin from her dress and stuck it into the bark of a pine.

"I wonder if it will be there when we return," she said.

This memory flashed through my mind and made me quite melancholy. At that moment I saw my wife run with a little cry toward a small pine. She pulled a rusty pin out of its bark. Then she threw herself about my neck and kissed me, with tears of happiness.

Cautiously she put the relic back into the bark of the tree. She didn't have the heart to take it away. Perhaps she entertained a superstitious fear of disturbing it. But from the moment she found it, the sad impressions of our own disappointment and other people's distress had vanished from both of us. As if this little incident had brought us a reassuring message from some good spirits, we walked back in a happy mood across the ruined places that had yielded nothing but a rusty old pin so well hidden that no one could take it away.

Chapter X

MANY a time I have thought of that pilgrimage to ruined shrines. Many a time it has seemed to me a symbol of our entire life.

But at the hour the incident had an effect quite different from the impression left behind in my memory. The immediate effect was that we went to the third place, which until then my wife had not even wished to see. There we rented for the second time a summer home, and light-heartedly we moved back to the district to which we felt attached by means of a rusty pin that no one could take away.

The summer that followed our spring excursion stands in my memory free from any cloud that might hide the sun. I worked with wonderful zest, and my work progressed easily. Quietly and without effort I added page after page to the book that was to appear in the fall. Frequently the dinner was on the table when Elsa closed the door of my workroom and sat down to hear me read the pages I had written during the morning. She sat there in quiet and happy enjoyment at seeing the pile of closely written sheets grow on the writing desk, because she knew who it was that gave life to my work. She knew that what I wrote about people grew out of long talks between her and me. She

was delighted when I called her a notebook that preserved my thoughts more securely than any writing could, and that gave them back to me refreshed and renewed. The fact was that when I recovered my thoughts from the faithful memory that preserved them better than my own, I saw them through the magnifying glass of love that she applied to everything concerning herself and me, above all, to my work. As I read, this fact made her feel that what she had seen in a sort of shapeless mist, had assumed tangible form in my writing. She experienced a quaint and subdued maternal joy in watching the production of these spiritual children of mine, and yet she was jealous of them because she imagined that they might capture my thoughts to the exclusion of herself, our home, our children, and everything else in life. In fact, I don't think she ever guessed that this co-operation with her was more precious to me than the writing itself.

Childish as it may sound, it is true that nothing had such power of spurring me into spiritual activity as being told by her facial expression, which could hide nothing, that I had succeeded and that she was satisfied. The thought of reading to her would be in my mind while I wrote, and this thought would drive away innumerable uninvited fancies that always try to interfere with the work of the pen. But when the reading was over and

we entered the diningroom, we had to laugh because the fish was cold and the boys, perfunctorily washed, bare-legged and sunburned, looked so very hungry and expectant.

"We have been waiting awfully long," Olof would grumble. "Where have you been?"

"We have been reading papa's book," she would say.

"Couldn't you do that after dinner?"

"No, we couldn't."

"That must be a queer book," Olof remarked.

But Svante, who had not yet learned to spell, came to the defense of papa's unknown book, and, as usual, mamma had to arbitrate the conflict and calm the troubled waters.

But what a summer it was! Such a glorious summer, full of the joy of work, of sea breezes, of bright sunlight and cool moonlit nights! I recall it as an unbroken stream of sunshine. I recall how friends put up their sailboats at our pier. I recall excursions with picnic baskets and brisk summer winds and open-air bathing, during which Olof learned to swim and Svante rolled about on the sandy bottom to show what he might do in the future. I recall anniversaries with garlands of flowers and verses, with strawberries and wine, with long silent walks through the pine forest that opened toward a sunlit sheet of water. I recall the customs guard with his fringe of grey whiskers,

who used to sail our boat, laughing until his beard shook at seeing a whole family of nothing but youth and children.

How short that summer was, and how early the fall came! And we followed the changes of the season with melancholy, seeing how the nights grew longer and the days shorter, how the meadow was shorn of its glorious blossoms, so that all nature seemed more bare than before, how the rye ripened and the reeds grew tall and thick around the shores, forming a dense, undulating carpet of green with purple tips where formerly the waves had rippled over bare rocks.

And when the day of departure approached at last, we sought out all the places we had cherished through the summer for a final visit. We climbed the hill with the best view, and we walked back and forth along the path through the woods, especially after dark, when the stars twinkled between the spruce branches. We used practically a whole week to say good-bye. We took the boys along on a sail around the island, and we talked about the book, our book, which was ready and was to appear in the fall. For hours at a time we walked the narrow path leading from the red house to the shore, and every night we tarried long on the pier listening to the lapping of the waves which sounded less restless than in the spring, but also more metallic.

The last night, when the moon of August was well on the wane, we went alone to the pier and took out the boat. We let the night breeze carry us far out on the black water, across which a yellow half-moon painted glittering paths, while around it the trees stood black and mysterious, with outlines quite different from those to be seen in the daytime. We seemed to sail through a magic landscape, listening to the tapping and splashing of the little waves against the boat's bow. We flew across the rippled surface with greater speed than ever by day, for the night breeze has more power than that of the day, or so it seems at least. Without a word or any previous agreement, I turned the boat and sailed around the point to our bathing place, where we landed on the rocks. With hands joined, we walked the accustomed path to the stunted pine tree whose rough bark held the rusty pin. We did not need to search for the tree, for we had frequently made pilgrimages to it during the summer, and we had no fear that any one would touch the tiny object that was so well hidden and that seemed to us the sign-manual of our own limitless happiness, which had threatened to depart, but had returned. As we stood there lost in thought, watching the moonlight drowned by the gloom beneath the pines, my wife said, "I can't let it stay. I must bring it along."

Then she pried it loose with careful hand and

fastened it in the linen within her blouse. "Perhaps I shall never come here again," she said, "and I want you to have it when I am gone."

Again we were carried away by the night breeze, and a presentiment of what I thought would never happen filled me with an inexpressible sense of sadness. I looked at Elsa's place in the boat. It seemed to become vacant as I looked, and I seemed to be sailing across a sheet of water that had other borders than those visible in the sunlight. This feeling took such hold of me that I forgot that I was not alone, and I jumped as if wakened to a new reality at the sound of my wife's voice. She spoke in a low tone as if to herself, and at first I heard her words without understanding them.

"I have thought many times," she said, "that there must be people who must believe in something, and from whom it would be criminal to take away their beliefs. I am so happy that your belief is the same as mine. I don't wish to do anything that you don't like. I don't even wish to have a belief that is not known to you. But I cannot help believing in God. Does that displease you very much?"

If my wife had asked the same question in our early youth, it would probably have aroused my combativeness, and I should have launched all sorts of arguments against such a belief, which the disillusioned tendency of the time had caused me

to regard with something bordering on tolerant contempt. The years that had aged me, had brought me no faith, but my sense of the inviolability of infinitely divergent individualities had killed my last remnant of desire to make a single proselyte, even if that one should be my own wife. I had no hard and fast belief. My belief was merely a groping for the greatest thing of all, and even during my earliest youth I had been puzzled by the dryness and coldness and poverty of what, rather poorly, is called materialism. But as a rule I was loath to speak of what remained muddled and formless within my own self, and now I felt not only surprised but humiliated by my wife's remark.

"Why should it displease me?" was my only answer.

"How glad I am," I heard her say, while her face remained almost indistinguishable. "Then it won't disquiet you when I tell you, that I still say my prayers every night as when I was a child. I don't know to whom I pray. But I make the boys pray for you and me and for each other. Do you think that is wrong?"

I fell off a little, left my place, took my wife's dear head between my hands and kissed her without being able to utter a word.

"My wish is, that there should be nothing you don't know," she said simply. Once more I was

at the helm. Once more the boat gathered speed, and after a while I saw between the trees a light that guided us to our home pier. With our arms about each other, we walked the narrow path to our summer home, and as we were kissing each other good-night, Elsa said: "You have made me very happy to-night. Oh, you don't know how happy you have made me."

I sat up late that night, and I did what I had never done while our summer happiness lasted. I thought of Elsa and myself. Time and again recurred the question why she should have asked me if I permitted her to believe in God and to pray. This was what she had done. And while this tender womanliness touched me like a breath of unutterable happiness, I felt a pang because she had ever thought it necessary to ask such a question. My thoughts surveyed our youth and all the years we had loved each other. It seemed that I had always wished to carry her in my arms. It seemed that I had always done so. And now her whole being vibrated with a note as if, in the midst of all this, I had touched her soul with careless hands; as if, unknowingly, I had inflicted a wound that might have bled a long time before she dared or could let me suspect that she suffered. She seemed in some way to be afraid of me, or of my criticism, or of both. And I asked myself, why?

I knew that I could not question her about these

matters, for then she would be certain to put her arms about my neck and say, "You! . . . . You! . . . . Never have you been anything but kind to me."

I seemed able to hear the passion in her voice as she said this. Yes, I knew that such would be her answer, and I knew, too, that she would feel everything she said as the ultimate truth, just as I knew that otherwise she could not say it at all. But this thought did not satisfy me. It was something quite different that now occupied me. What did I care at this moment whether my wife prayed to God or did not pray at all? What did I care whether or no she thought this thing or that? What she said had struck me like an arrow making straight for my heart. Her words had become one with herself, with the whole summer now gone by, with my sensation of that sail across dark waters, of the wind in the woods, and of the moon's glittering path across the curling waves. All of it melted into a total impression that sang to me of a treasure that I had won: a treasure that could not be divided or transformed, but that would be mine as long as I understood that it grew in silence for me alone.

Throughout these reflections I was tortured by the thought that, nevertheless, involuntarily I had frightened her. It tortured me in spite of her own words that still rang in my ears. In my mind I

surveyed everything between us that I could recall as having anything to do with this matter, and when I could remember nothing of the sort, I continued to search my thoughts for what I could not find.

What I experienced was a burdensome sense of guilt. What I could not remember was when and how I had become guilty. It merely seemed that I was and must be guilty. When I entered our room to go to bed, I was startled by seeing that my wife was awake. But when I lay down beside her, she merely leaned over toward me and kissed my hand.

Never have I seen a happier expression on her face.

Chapter XI

AT last, however, the day approached—the long expected day when the secret already known to me, which had quickened her soul and given wings to her hope, would be revealed to all; the day when happiness again would take up her abode in our home to stay forever. This consciousness had helped to brighten our summer—at least, it seems so to me now. But just as wonderful as everything seems now, when retrospect has brought me an explanation, just as simple and natural it appeared then, and I was far from guessing the entire significance of all that happened to us.

We had two children before, and I had witnessed more than one of these touching signs of expectant mother joy, which a man in love with his wife can never forget. But never before had I seen my wife so filled with gladness at what was impending. Never before had she gone about in such a state of consecrated bliss. Never had she understood how to charge our everyday life with a holiday mood as she did in the dreary city during this gloomy autumn, when it rained all the time, and when the whole of life around us seemed heavy and hard as never before.

We had two boys, and this made it natural that we should refer to the little newcomer as "the

girl." It was her we expected and her we discussed. One day when I returned from my work, my wife said to me, "It is my angel, George, that is coming to save me."

I had lived so long in forgetfulness of ever being threatened by a danger, that I did not understand her words at first. "Save you?" I repeated mechanically. "From what?"

A strange expression came over her, as if she had withdrawn within herself to ponder how two persons in love with each other could possibly feel things so differently. "Have you already forgotten how it was last winter?" she asked.

"I thought that was all over," I said.

"Do you think anything ever is all over?" was her retort. And she added, "Perhaps the little one that is coming may do what nothing else can do."

I thought often of this brief talk, and I tried vainly to make it harmonize with the untroubled happiness we had experienced during the past summer. Was it possible that my wife, beneath the sunny light of fortune that colored her whole being, carried the seed of a misfortune that at some future time would overshadow our entire existence? Was it possible? Could she be living a dual life? Could she live in the midst of sunlight, feeling at the same time that night was close at hand? Did her present foreboding or fear per-

haps belong to the fancies that generally accompany her condition?

I tried to find peace in the latter alternative, but was never quite successful. More and more I began to see my wife's entire life in a new and different light — the light that finally was to surround her completely.

I cannot describe the feeling of tenderness aroused within me by these thoughts, for which I could not even find words. And I hardly dared to believe my own eyes when everything went well, and when, after a hard struggle, my wife slowly began to recover, having given life to a tiny creature for which, from the very start, she reserved words that no one else could hear.

But the girl never came. She was changed into a boy, who was named Sven.

PART II

PART TWO

Chapter I

LITTLE Sven grew and became everybody's darling. He had long golden hair, and in memory of the girl that never came, his mother used to curl it so that it lay in golden ringlets around his little face with the transparent skin and the marvelous eyes of an angel. No child ever had deeper, larger eyes or such a precociously dream-filled glance. No child ever possessed a more confiding, caressing little hand, which stole into the hand of some grown-up person as if he felt sure of safety everywhere because he himself was aware of no evil.

Little Sven was the idol of Big Brother, the eldest. Nothing was prettier than to see Big Brother, who liked to appear manly and, therefore, disliked any display of feeling, pull Little Brother about in a small cart, gloating over his happy expression and turning all the time to see that he didn't fall out. The only thing comparable to it was to see the same thing done by Svante, who in addition enjoyed so much more playing protector because, in all his games with Big Brother, he was the little boy who had to take orders. Sven was so much smaller than his older brothers, whom he admired and followed, that he always remained

Little Brother, and he was so jolly that the whole house gathered about him when something pleasant had befallen him and his ringing voice or bright laughter filled the rooms. Everybody came to see his eyes sparkle and his small white hands beat the air in ecstasy, to behold this radiant joy of childhood that brought sunlight into every heart.

Oh, I wish that I had written this story about Little Brother before, so that I could have placed it page by page in front of her who knew the brief tale of his life better than I, better than anybody else. She remembered his every word, every little detail out of his life's book. She lived his life and her own as if the two were one. She lived with him even when his bright eyes no longer spread their light among us. She finally followed him upon the paths where no one may follow until the time is ripe. Had it been possible, she would have poured her own spirit into what I wish to say; and what I write about a little child would then assuredly have carried the conviction of dealing with one still alive.

Little Sven lived and did everything with and for his mother. Her room was his nursery, and every morning when papa was away and the big boys were at their lessons, Sven would sit on the floor and hear mamma tell fairy tales. She knew many of them, but there was no tale Sven liked

better than that about Little Red Riding Hood, who went to her grandmother with berries, and who was eaten by the bad, bad wolf. He grew terribly excited when he thought of the fate of Little Red Riding Hood, and he was so frightened by the wicked wolf, and so angry at him. When he grew up, he would go and look for him, and shoot him.

Sometimes he and mamma would invent games. They played that Sven went away and stayed away, and that mamma sat alone waiting for him. Then Sven would return, and there was rejoicing so great that mamma had to drop her work and take him on her knee and kiss him many times. And they played many other games.

Little Sven had many names at home. He was called Little Brother, and Nenne, which was a name invented by himself, and Chubs, and Goldilocks, and all sorts of things. He recognized all his names, could enumerate them, and was very proud of them. Little Sven never played much with other children, and particularly not long at a time. He always returned to his mother as if it had been the most natural thing in the world. Nor did he care if he broke up the game and offended the other children. If he only caught sight of his mother, he ran away from everything, took her hand, and followed her wherever she went. His was a love that surpassed all belief, and that never

cooled, because its object rejoiced too much in the relationship to be annoyed by it at any time.

Sven and his mother had their own little secrets, and when Sven whispered to mamma, not even papa must hear. If he tried in order to tease the little one, Sven cried, "No, he mustn't. He mustn't. Tell him, he mustn't."

And mamma guarded her treasure and kept papa at a distance, so that Sven had a chance to pour into her ear all he had to say.

When all was done, Sven exulted in his triumph. "There, you see," he said. "You couldn't hear."

Then he walked about with his hand in mamma's, laughing at his father. He called this "getting papa's goat," and there were few things he enjoyed more.

I can still see them, whenever I wish, hand in hand, walking back and forth along the gravel path starting by the lilac bushes — walking under bare trees in the winter, when Sven was dressed in his little fur coat of which he was very proud, and which had been made for him out of mamma's old one because he was so frail. It would be hard to decide which one of the two had most to tell the other. And if, after looking at them a long while, I wished to join them, Sven became jealous and puckered up his little red mouth in a manner that compelled mamma to rebuke his behavior toward the head of the family, and to tell him how nice

papa was. This Sven did not like to admit at such times. And as we walked together, he managed to make signals to mamma which papa was not to see, just as if it pleased him to maintain the magic circle of intimate confidence which he had drawn about his love and himself, and within which he brooked no intrusion.

But when papa had gone to the city and returned, then it was Sven who stood behind the door waiting for a real chance to scare him. There he took up his place long before the time when papa was expected home. Time and again he would leave his hiding place to ask mamma, "Don't you think I can fool him this time?"

Mamma thought so, of course, and Sven's joy overflowed in anticipation. But when papa arrived at last and stopped in the hallway to scrape the dirt off his rubbers, Sven stole up to him silently and gently, with no thought of scaring him. And there he stood smiling to himself as if he knew perfectly well that papa could not see him without being pleased. Little by little he came forward, as if enjoying papa's impatience to seize him in his arms. Then he clung to papa's neck and let himself be carried into the house, while the family bulldog, which Svante once upon a time had named Poodle, danced about us whining with joy.

I have such a clear memory of my wife's eyes as they rested on this scene.

"You don't know how much I talk with him about you," she said, when Sven at last would let papa go so that mamma might have her chance.

Chapter II

FROM the time Sven was large enough to move about at all, he became Poodle's most intimate friend and had the right to do with him whatever he wished. He might pull his ears and pinch his stump of a tail. He might lie on top of him and keep him in the most uncomfortable positions. Poodle manifested hardly any displeasure except by looking a little puzzled at times, as if unable to fathom why such an ordeal must befall him, and by removing himself gently and peacefully to some new resting place, in the vain hope that his well-meaning tormentor would tire and leave him alone.

But if Sven left the house, Poodle followed him wherever he went. Snuffling through his broad, cloven muzzle, he would watch how Sven slowly and thoughtfully poured sand into a little tin pail or resorted to the less suitable amusement of splashing in the rainwater barrel. Poodle stayed by his side all the time, and if strangers approached, Poodle observed their every movement with suspicious eyes, prepared for any emergency that might require his intervention.

Otherwise Sven and Poodle had their own peculiar ways, and more than once they threw the whole house into a panic by disappearing in the most inexplicable manner. Then, when all had

begun to despair of ever seeing them alive again, they would suddenly reappear as if nothing had happened, both equally astonished at the commotion they had created.

It would be wrong to call Sven disobedient, but on this particular point he was rather hard to deal with. More than once mamma promised him a spanking if he ever went away again by himself. More than once she avowed to me afterwards that she would take the heart's blood of anybody who dared to lay hands on Sven. But Sven remained equally unmoved by corrections and pleas, and mamma's extravagant joy at finding him alive after one of those excursions seemed merely to fill him with a strange wonder that he and she could ever have different opinions about anything in the world.

"There was no danger," Sven would say. "Why, Poodle was along."

Mamma did not wish to say anything disparaging about Poodle, but she tried to persuade Sven that, after all, Poodle was not quite the same as a human being. She said everything she could possibly think of. And with his arms about her neck, Sven would promise that he would never again run away and make mamma unhappy.

But when he found himself once more alone in the open air, and it was springtime, and the water flowed in little rivers across the front yard, Sven

forgot everything on earth but that he was a little boy who must wander far, far away into the forest.

Who knows what his thoughts were, or if he ever knew that he was entering forbidden paths? He walked along prattling to himself, with Poodle at his heels, and when he got as far as the gate, he found it wide open. Then he must step outside in order to have a glance at the world that lay so temptingly beyond, and there, by the ditch across the road, he saw the glimmer of yellow dandelions against the greyish soil, and so he had to toddle across as fast as his little legs could carry him. Then he was almost in the woods, and resistance became no longer possible. The pines rose tall and rugged above his head, and he had to take a look among their trunks where the sunlight shone on the moss and the first spring birds had begun their singing. A little field mouse came running between the stones, and Sven ran after it. Farther and farther away he went. He came across a swamp, and in the midst of it grew sallows with golden catkins on them. These he could not reach without stepping into the water and getting his feet wet. But he could always hurl a few stones into the swamp and hear them say "ploomp" and watch the wide rings that spread in waves across the surface of the little pool. This he did, and he kept it up for a good long while. His cheeks glowed, and his eyes shone with delight. He felt more and

more happy, and he walked all the way to the field where stood the royal summer palace, and no sooner had he reached the road than he began to run. He ran and ran, and passing through a tall gateway, he found himself near home again. It made him still more happy to know the way and to see Poodle snort and wave his stubby tail as a sign of wishing to get home. But suddenly he began to long for his mother, and at the same time he remembered the yellow flowers he was carrying.

Slowly and thoughtfully he wandered homeward, and perhaps some vague notion entered his mind, that he ought not to have left home at all. But there was one thing he didn't know and never could make out. That was how long he had been away — a couple of hours or a few minutes were all one to him.

Just as he came toddling across the lawn and thought of running again in order to reach mamma, so that he might sit on her lap and be petted and kissed, and so that he might tell of all the fun he had had, he was shocked by hearing people shouting all around him. There were papa and mamma, Olof and Svante, the two servant girls, and a lot more, it seemed to Sven. They shouted all at once, one from this spot and another from that. Where they all came from, was more than Sven had time to tell. No sooner did he turn in one direction, than some one else called to him

from behind; and as he tried to turn about in order to look in the opposite direction, he was snatched from the ground and carried off by somebody who came running at top speed. And before he knew what was happening to him, he was in the front room, and mamma herself had him in her arms and was hugging him so that he couldn't breathe.

Of course, Sven knew that he never need be afraid of his mother, but this time he lost his courage nevertheless. He recalled what she had said about spanking, and at the sight of papa he became really concerned, for papa had a grim look and said in a very serious tone: "This time, Sven, you'll get a spanking, I guess, for that was what I heard mamma promise you."

Then Sven didn't know what to do, and in his distress he bethought himself of the flowers, which he offered to mamma.

This he need not have done. Mamma had been so frightened, and she was so happy now at having him back, that she merely hugged him and surrendered herself to his caresses, laughing and crying in quick succession. Finally she took the flowers and put them in a little green glass, and arranged them to let Sven see how beautiful they looked in the sunlight. Then papa abandoned all thoughts of punishment and went into his own room, feeling quite superfluous.

But when mamma was alone with Sven, she took

him on her lap and told him, as if it were a fairy tale, how troubled she had been and how horribly she had felt. She told him that she believed he had broken a leg and was lying alone in the woods, so that they would not be able to find him until he was dead; or that he had fallen into the water and would not be found alive, and then neither papa nor mamma nor his brothers could ever be happy again. Sven listened to it all, but he understood only that mamma was nicer to him than any other person. Then she let him tell all he had seen and done, what fun he had had, and how far away he had ventured. She heard about the little mouse and the birds and the swamp and the stone-throwing. And in the end those two understood each other perfectly, and were simply happy to have found each other again.

When they had talked it all over, mamma took Sven to the what-not. There stood a number of precious objects with which Sven was permitted to play at times, when he had been very, very good. Among other things, there was a white porcelain poodle with a tufted tail and a little slipper in his mouth. It was very old and didn't really belong to mamma. It had been given to papa by his mother, and it had been hers since she was two years old, when she received it as a present from her godmother.

It was the finest thing known to Sven, and now,

out of her heart's happiness, she took it from the what-not and gave it to Sven instead of a spanking. Yet he left it in its place. "Because," said Sven, "I might break it, and then papa would be mad."

But he never forgot that it was his, and sometimes he would mention the fact when we had company. "Mamma gave it to me," Sven would say, "when I ran away to the woods and came back again. It was because mamma felt so happy at seeing me again."

And mamma's defence against any criticism of her method of education was to lift up the boy so that everybody could have a look at him. Bless her heart! She was right.

Chapter III

A YEAR went by, but we didn't notice its passing. Then my wife's health began to fail seriously, and without any discussion both of us knew that only one alternative remained. Once before she had submitted to the perilous interference of the surgeon's knife, and the symptoms now appearing were only too familiar. Therefore, it came as no surprise when the doctor one day delivered his verdict, making certain what we had already guessed, namely, that nothing but an immediate operation could preserve Elsa for me and the children.

That day we went about our home as if a death sentence had been pronounced upon our whole life, and I could see that Elsa was bidding everything good-bye. For the first time I perceived how much of her innermost thoughts she had kept hidden from me, as from everybody else; how familiar she was with the thought of death, and how the certainty of an early death was gnawing at her innermost being. She had grown pale, and her cheeks were hollow. Her hands were yellow as wax, and she went about in agony.

Then she asked me for the first time to be permitted to die. For the first time she told me everything that she had kept hidden within herself —

everything that I had pressed her to tell, and that had never been allowed to pass her lips except in the form of vague hints.

"Since I was very young," she said, "since long before you and I learned to know each other, the thought has been natural to me, that I should not be permitted to live long. Then I found you, and all the rest was forgotten, because you made me happy, George, so much happier than I could ever make you. You gave me three children — my two big boys and Sven. And what can I do for you, for them, for all of you? I am ill, you know, and I shall never be well. But you must not forget me, George. Oh, yes, I know you will mourn for me, because you love me, although I have always been weak and ailing and of no use to anybody. But still you must not forget me. And you will find some one else to help you with the children."

Once more she begged me to be permitted to die, to be permitted to live in peace during the few weeks that remained. The only thing to which she objected was death on the operating table, but she was satisfied to pass away, and she wished only to live long enough in spite of her suffering to prepare the children for what must come, and to bid them farewell.

All this came upon me so suddenly that I could not think clearly, and much less find words for an answer. I had a vague feeling that any interfer-

ence on my part meant participation in a battle going far beyond and above what human beings generally are doomed to experience. I felt the shyness I have always observed whenever it became a question of touching anything that had been another person's innermost and most inaccessible possession. And if there be anything that cannot be decided by any one else, it is whether a person should submit to a certain death or take up a hard struggle for an uncertain recovery of life. As I looked at my wife, she seemed at once so close to me and yet so distant. Her plea for permission to die was so touching and so seriously meant, that I lacked courage to ask her to return to life for my sake. And I noticed with surprise that she was capable of leaving everything she loved because she was prepared for it. At the same time I felt with all the force of despair, that I couldn't bear losing her. I could not. And reaching out in desperation for the only thing that came into my mind, I merely said, "And Sven? Can you leave Sven?"

She quailed as if before a fatal blow, and wrung her hands in agony. "No, no, I cannot!"

Staggering toward our bedroom door, she asked to be left alone. I saw the door close behind her; I sat still as she had left me, and it seemed to me that my whole life with her was past and dead, and that now she must go away from us. I under-

stood that if she didn't, it would not be for my sake, but for the sake of the little one with the golden hair and the marvelous eyes — her angel child that had come to tie her more strongly to life. I understood all this, but it did not hurt me. I found it quite natural that I alone could not hold her back. I bowed my head and wept, wept for the first time over myself and my own life. I looked forward to nothing, hoped for nothing, but to see the days advance quietly and mercilessly toward the hour that must strike some time, and at last to see death tear asunder everything for which I had lived.

I don't know how long I sat in this state. All I know is that twilight descended upon me, and that I was startled by discovering my wife on her knees before me, with her head laid against my arm. She had entered so silently that I had not heard her, and her voice sounded calm when she spoke, "I will live for you, George, and for Sven, and for our big boys."

I knew that voice of hers when it took on a depth and warmth as if everything but her love had been silenced within her. I understood that her decision now was inflexible, that once more she belonged to all of us, or wished to do so, and a hot wave of gratitude toward her and toward life passed through me. A long while went by before we altered our position, but when we did

so, she rose and lighted all the lamps as for a party.

Then she called the children, and they came silent and wondering, and there was no need for explanations. They had understood, each one in his own way. They had talked among themselves, just as we grown-ups had done, and they knew that their mother's life was at stake, but that she risked it in order that she might live with them.

Sven climbed into mamma's lap and huddled close to her. And he made us all laugh through our tears by saying, "Mamma must not die and leave her little Chubs alone."

It was one of his pet names within the family, and he used it without the least idea that it might sound funny. For this reason his words calmed us with something like a promise of life.

But when the children had gone to bed, Elsa and I walked through the room with our arms about each other. I saw that once more she was saying good-bye, but in a manner different from that of a few hours ago. The next day she was to go to the hospital.

Next morning, when I came out of our room, I found Olof seated in the big armchair opposite the bedroom door.

"Have you sat here long?" I asked in surprise.

"Yes," the boy answered laconically.

He had sat there thinking of his mother, and

of how solemn everything had become of a sudden. For the first time it struck me how big he was, and I took his hand as if he were of my own age. His ten-year-old face twitched, but he was incapable of uttering a word.

When Elsa and I were seated in the cab, he had gained control over himself. He climbed on the footstep at my wife's side, patted her cheek, and said protectingly as to a child, "Don't be afraid, mamma. Everything will be all right."

Svante showed himself, too, and little Sven was lifted up, babbling and prattling. At that moment Elsa did not know which one of all she loved most. But during the drive our talk returned constantly to our big boy who, for the first time, had talked and felt like a man.

Chapter IV

THE angel of death passed by our home that time, but his wings had brushed so close to us that what then happened long stamped our entire life. In fact, it never ceased to do so. Nevertheless, happiness returned once more to our home, but it was subdued and more sombre. Once more she who alone could give a holiday mood to our workaday life came back to us. Our boys bade us welcome on our return, and Sven crawled into his mother's lap, snuggled close to her, and looked so blessedly happy and roguish.

"Do you see now that you couldn't die and leave your little Chubs?" he said.

He looked triumphant as if he considered the happy outcome attributable to himself, and largely in order to cheer us all up, I said, "You seem to think that it's you who have made mamma well."

"And so it is," retorted my wife.

And once more I noticed on her face the expression that formerly had impressed me so strangely, but which more and more I became capable of understanding.

She clasped the little one in her arms, and two bright tears dropped from her eyes. Then she gave her hand to me and said, "I am so glad to be home again."

I could make no answer. I merely looked at the group before me, and I knew that here was the happiness for which I hardly dared to hope a few weeks earlier. And yet I felt in my heart a pang that seemed a first intimation of hopeless loneliness.

Chapter V

I RECALL the spring that followed as a sea of flowers overflowing every empty spot in our home. Gradually the hyacinths were mixed with blue anemones, these in their turn with white anemones, with primroses and violets; and finally, as midsummer approached and the awnings flapped in the summer breeze, the lilacs appeared.

The flowers were brought in by mamma and Sven, and it would be hard to tell which of the two loved the flowers most. I can still see them side by side, with their hands full of flowers, red-cheeked and talkative, as they walked across the big front yard toward the open veranda. Her hair was as dark as his was fair, but both had the same deep blue eyes. They formed a most singular contrast, and yet they bore a closer resemblance to each other than mother and child generally do. They belonged together as if created to wander side by side, always with flowers in their hands, to the very end of life, and always gazing into each other's eyes. No one could behold them without a sunny smile brightening his face. This I noticed often, and felt myself the richer on account of it.

Life, indeed, seemed rich and full to me during this time as never before. I forgot once more what had filled my soul with heavy forebodings,

and I found full satisfaction in the present. It seemed as if we had had to pass through everything that was burdensome and sad merely that we might enjoy a more complete happiness afterwards. I was grateful for every new day that passed. I was glad to be able to forget. And it seemed to me that we were borne onward to a good fortune greater than that generally reached by men.

I believe that my wife, for a time at least, shared this feeling. It was from her that our constant stream of happiness flowed. She had returned to life indeed. She felt well. She lived beneath tall old trees in the midst of an abundance of flowers. She had us about her, and nothing disturbed our peace.

One evening she was walking with me along the path we liked most of all because there we were sure of meeting nobody. All around us blossoming lilacs filled the air with their fragrance. Against the bright June sky the half-moon appeared almost lightless, as if bathed in the blue that formed a wide-spreading arch to the horizon where it met the plains. Pale stars seemed trying to sparkle in that blue without being able to break the luminous brightness of the night.

As I think of this time and all that followed, I am astounded at our powers of recuperation. Every evening we were happy as if nothing but a

slight cloud had appeared on our sky and passed away again, and there was not a sign of melancholy in our talk. All that had been lay buried behind us. Of course, it was not a careless happiness based on the blind and untried self-confidence of youth. It was far more than that. It was the calm and tacit harmony that comes to people who have suffered and conquered together: a happiness that nothing can spoil or destroy because it springs indissolubly from the innermost recesses of two human souls. We knew during this time that we desired nothing, asked nothing, but what we already had. It is during such periods of life that one of the twain may seek solitude to wipe away his tears, for shame of showing how happy he is. No strange thoughts, playing truant on their own account, no imaginings, no desires, have the power to disturb this profound sentiment out of which grows the power to live. All that was ever sung by saga or legend lives then its full, never-dwindling life beyond what any poem can express, and I believe that such experiences alone can sanctify the common life of man and woman.

Such, at least, were our feelings during these mild spring nights that always ended at the same place, the bedside of our sleeping children. We spoke very little about our emotions. One night, however, my wife asked, "How long have we been married?"

"Why do you ask — you who can never forget a date?"

"Can it really be more than ten years? Can it be true that we are as old as that?"

"Does it make you sad?" I rejoined with a smile.

She came closer to me and took my arm. "There was a time when I was afraid of growing old," she said. "And so I still am. But I don't understand people's talk when they say that you love most and are most happy in youth. That must be the talk of people who don't know how to love."

I tried to argue, but she interrupted me to speak of others. She mentioned friends whom we liked and acquaintances with whom we associated. She denied that they could be happy. She related traits of their lives, things they had done and things they had said. She dwelt at still greater length on what they had failed to do or say. And she said in conclusion: "I believe the people of our time have forgotten how to love. They are occupied with so many other things."

All that my wife said on this occasion surprised me. Though a woman, she rarely referred to others when alone with me, and now I tried to defend humanity. I even made her admit a couple of exceptions.

But she answered me as if she were not really listening; and when I stopped, she went right on

pursuing her own line of thought, "Why are you and I more happy than all other people?" She spoke earnestly as if merely stating a well known and recognized fact, and she added, "It seems to me that all the rest are unhappy in comparison with you and me."

I smiled at her intensity, but her words warmed my heart. "Why make any comparisons?" I asked.

"Because they make me happy," she replied.

Stepping right in front of me and looking into my face, she continued: "I want to say this now because otherwise it may never be said. It seems so queer when I think of the earliest period of our marriage. Then I thought that I loved you and was very happy. It was because I knew nothing and understood nothing. Now I know what it is, and now I want to thank you."

Before I could prevent her, she had seized my left hand and kissed it. When I tried to pull it away, she clung to it and kissed it again at the base of the finger bearing my wedding ring.

As she spoke those words, there was a power in her emotion, about her whole person, that confused me. Silently I took her in my arms and kissed her with a sense of kissing my bride for the first time. And like her, I knew that the earth held no greater bliss.

Chapter VI

SVEN found a playmate, and this was quite an event in his little life. Until then he had played only with his big brothers. This playmate was a few months younger than Sven, and a girl to boot. All this was very novel and exciting, so that Sven had a great deal to talk about with mamma during this time.

Little Martha had moved to the country with her parents, and at first she and Sven had eyed each other from a distance. Martha was an indescribably sweet little girl, with healthy red cheeks, clear blue eyes and long curly hair that somewhat resembled Sven's. Ere long she came one day and seated herself not far from Sven, curious to see what he was doing.

Sven was accustomed to play by himself, and there was one game that amused him very much and that was quite easy to learn. All he did was to go out into the front yard and sit down on the lawn. There he watched with great interest whatever happened in his immediate vicinity. Ants climbed the blades of grass. A butterfly visited a flower and then fluttered away on white wings into the sunlight. A beetle lay on its back and had to be turned right side up before it could proceed on its journey. A couple of birds hopped about

between the tussocks without letting the child disturb their search of food for themselves and their young. Sometimes he did nothing but pluck blades of grass and rub them between his fingers with a mien of thoughtful investigation. When his hand was full, he threw them all away and picked new ones. Sven himself had called this game "to sit green grass," and he had much to say about it when he interrupted the game and ran to mamma with a tale of all the observations he had made. Little Martha sat watching this game, and at last she asked him what he was doing.

"Don't you know I'm sitting green grass?" asked Sven. And his eyes grew big with astonishment.

No, Martha did not know at all. But as Sven was able to keep it up so long, she assumed that it must be remarkably amusing, and so she sat down beside him. The two children picked grass and poked the ants and became so well acquainted that they left the spot hand in hand, feeling that they could never part again.

A couple of days later Sven sat in mamma's room talking about Martha. He had ceased to talk about grass and flowers and birds and butterflies. All he talked about now was what Martha had said, and what Martha had done, and how much fun they had together.

One day mamma said to him, "You like Martha very much, don't you?"

Sven thrust out his lips and answered, "Don't you know we are engaged?"

Mamma answered very seriously, "You never told me."

"You ought to know, anyhow," Sven remarked. "We are going to get married."

"When?" asked mamma.

"When we grow up, of course," Sven replied.

Sven was very happy to be engaged to a girl whom he was going to marry, and one could see no prettier spectacle than the two children coming hand in hand across the front yard, with the sunlight playing on their curly hair, or Sven pulling Martha in a little cart and turning around all the time to look at her.

Sometimes they quarreled. Then Sven became gloomy and went in to mamma and said that Martha was horrid.

Then mamma rejoined, "Yes, but as you are to marry her, I suppose you must make up and be friends again."

"I don't want to marry her," said Sven.

Nevertheless, having kissed and made up, they soon were friends again, and after that they had more fun than ever before.

It was a foregone conclusion that mamma should worship Sven's best girl as much as he did

himself; and so, when she came to take Sven with her, and he found himself unable to desert Martha (quite a new experience in his little life), the dilemma was solved by mamma's going off with a lover at either hand. Thus she became at once their playmate and confidante. I fear that she even discussed both love and marriage with them, because she knew their language as no one else, and it is not impossible that by force of imagination she felt as if she already were a mother-in-law.

It was of no use that any one tried to take Sven's love humorously. Olof, of course, made fun of Little Brother and tried to explain that a real man does not care for girls. Even Svante, whose conscience was not quite clear in this respect, tried to get at Little Brother by saying he was too small.

In his distress Sven turned to mamma as the supreme authority. And mamma told him not to mind what the big boys said. If he liked Martha, that was nothing to make fun of, whether he be small or big.

Therewith Sven regarded his brothers as completely crushed, and after that he refused to let them spoil his happiness. He himself took his happiness so seriously that he did not understand how any one could take it in jest, and for that reason he made no secret of his affairs. If, as might happen, some grown-up person asked him whether it was true that he was engaged, he said yes with-

out more ado, and the next moment he could be seen playing with Martha as if he wished the whole world to notice that she was pretty and sweet as a fiancée should be.

Taking it all in all, Sven's manner was such that everybody ceased to poke fun at him, and even his brothers had to leave him alone.

One day, however, Olof got the bright idea of telling him that he had hair like a girl. Sven had never heard such a thing before, nor would he have cared before.

But now Big Brother added, "That won't do for you, because you are engaged."

This hit Sven very hard. From that day he never ceased to nag mamma about his hair. "I want my hair like the other boys," he said.

It did not help mamma to object or to ask Sven not to mind what the big boys said. It did not even help her to beg Sven to keep his pretty locks for the sake of mamma, who loved them so much. Sven maintained that they must go.

"I don't want to look like a girl," he said.

Mamma felt sad at the mere thought of having any one touch those beautiful locks. "I cannot imagine Chubs without his locks," she said.

She took him in her arms, whispered to him, babbled, argued and begged on behalf of the cherlished locks. But Sven was not to be persuaded. He begged so prettily and looked at her so per-

suasively, that at last he was allowed to have his way.

He came running in his little red hat, with the white dress flapping about his little legs. "I am going to town to have my hair cut," he shouted.

He was full of eagerness and excitement. On the train he talked like a streak and even turned to an old gentleman whom he had never seen before, in order to tell him that he was going to town to have his long hair cut off.

The old gentleman looked up from his newspaper, cast a preoccupied and indifferent glance at the boy, and resumed his reading.

Sven believed the other one had not heard, and so he reiterated in order to make the matter clear. "I am going to have my hair cut so I won't look like a girl."

But the old gentleman intrenched himself behind his paper and muttered something that caused mamma to silence Chubs.

After that Sven sat quiet and silent all the way as if brooding over something. He looked so miserable that his mother took him on her lap and patted him, feeling quite furious at the old gentleman who could not understand that Sven felt sorry every strange gentleman would not take part in a little boy's happiness.

Sven remained silent until he left the station. Then he whispered to his mother as if afraid of

being overheard, "I don't think he was a nice old man."

"But, Sven," said mamma, "you didn't know him at all."

"That's no reason for him not to be nice," retorted Sven.

"But little boys shouldn't talk to strange people," mamma persisted.

"I thought it would make him glad to hear that I shouldn't have to look like a girl any longer."

Poor little child, mamma thought, and once more her heart grew angry against all the "grouchy" people who spoil the happiness of the little ones. Poor little child! How will you fare in the world?

And in order to console Sven and make him happy again, she said, "That was a horrid, wicked old man. Yes, real wicked he was."

At that Sven brightened up again, and his sorrow was gone because he could believe that only wicked people acted like that. He had his hair cut, and then he was taken to a tea room where he had pastry and felt very happy because he thought everybody was aware that he had his hair cut like a boy for the first time. Then he journeyed homeward with mamma. The moment he reached the front yard, he dropped mamma's hand and ran as fast as his legs could carry him to surprise papa.

He stopped by the writing desk and took off

his hat, quite forgetting that papa was not to be disturbed at his work. He stood still, hat in hand, his whole body twitching with excitement at what papa might say. His eyes grew bigger and bigger until it seemed as if the whole boy was nothing but eyes.

Papa looked and looked with a sense that something quite remarkable must have happened. At last he saw light, and then he had to hoist Chubs to the ceiling.

"Now Sven looks like a real boy," papa said.

Having received this certificate of manliness, Sven ran away to show himself to his big brothers and to receive the admiration of Martha.

Chapter VII

THE rest of that summer, begun in such smiling surroundings, was to be spent on the west coast. The reason was that a longing stronger than words could express tugged at my heart.

I cannot explain how this unreasonable longing got into my blood. Perhaps the cause was that, as a child, I once spent a summer on the west coast. It is fairly well proved what a part such early, often accidental, but strong, childhood impressions play in forming the background of feelings that are later to determine our lives.

It seems peculiar to myself that the memories of those weeks could have kept alive more than thirty years. I was only six years old at the time, and commonly all memories of that age fade away except those imparted by a home where one has spent many years. Yet I have visioned the sea for many years as I saw it then. I have seen it throwing up enormous waves that were additionally enlarged by the child's fancy. I have seen seaweed and jellyfish and starfish and all that rich life found on the bottom of shallow bays and at the foot of grey rocks. I have seen treeless rocks rise out of the sea that broke at their feet. My memory has projected queer reminiscences of a tremendous

storm that flung loads of sand at my sensitive child face.

It is strange how long you can keep such a recollection, and stranger still what a singular power it can get over your soul. Such a memory is full of a tugging desire like that of the young girl's dream about a knight that some day is to bend over her mouth with whispers of a limitless happiness. It has much in common with what the youth feels when his pulsing blood sings its promises of future victories. But probably it has most in common with the calm expectation of the future that dwells in a man whose youth has never died. It lay at the bottom of my soul like nostalgia, but decades passed before I could listen to its promptings.

When at last, after many years, I reached so far that I knew it to be possible to enjoy a summer by the sea, it was my wife who made me fear that all my joy might vanish like smoke. She had never seen the west coast, and I knew that she regarded the entire trip with a sort of repulsion, consenting only because she understood that I should be hurt by the slightest resistance. I knew this because she once said, "I cannot imagine a summer where you see no trees."

I understood perfectly that, in speaking those words, she revealed a dislike for the trip so deeply rooted that she feared herself incapable of overcoming it. Having seen, however, that I noticed

her repulsion, she did everything to make me forget her remark. Still it remained with me, and I began to feel depressed at the thought of my cherished trip to the sea.

To me this matter was neither insignificant nor foolish, as it may seem to others. True enjoyment is impossible when mingled with discord, and I could think of no worse discord than my wife's failure to share my enjoyment. I had grown accustomed never to feel alone, in joy or sorrow, and it broke my heart to find myself alone in my desire.

I wanted my dream of this summer to become reality, and I fought for it with the same eagerness as when I believed myself about to lose my wife's love and fought to recover it. Day and night I pondered a method to ward off the danger that seemed to menace my summer's pleasure, and finally I thought I had found it. One day I proposed to my wife that we make the tour to the west coast by water, skirting the coast of Sweden the whole way. This I did to conquer her. I felt that a silent battle was being fought between us, and I did not wish to be vanquished. I wanted to compel my wife to love the sea, and the means I had invented to gain this purpose seemed to me the best ever conceived by man. My line of reasoning was this:

"Our start will take us through the Stockholm

archipelago. Then we continue down the beautiful eastern coast. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, she will see the smiling nature of the east coast change into the bareness of the western shore, and unconsciously she will be gripped by a grandeur surpassing everything else in nature."

I dare not say, however, that the journey itself comprised any incident warranting a belief that my skillfully conceived plan had proved effective. As usual, my wife enjoyed an interesting trip by boat, but I could not discover that our voyage served to turn her thoughts in any particular direction. It was to her merely a long steamship journey, than which she knew nothing better, but that was all.

I was tense with expectation all the time, but my courage began to wane when we passed Gothenburg and I saw the sea froth and fume about my longed-for west-coast boulders.

A brisk storm was blowing, and I did not welcome it just then, not so much because it increased the difficulties of our journey, the last part of which had to be made in an open boat, as because a storm on the western coast is little apt to remove an already existing dislike of the region bordering the open sea. I sat in the fishing-boat watching my wife all the time with a sidelong glance as the boat rose on the crest of a wave and the water raced from bow to stern. I discovered nothing that could

answer my dumb inquiry. She appeared quite inaccessible as she sat gazing across the black waters, while hundreds of conflicting voices rose within me, all of them, as it seemed, joining in a tremendous effort to win her heart and sympathy.

As I sat thus, however, my uneasiness began to yield. Untroubled by any misgiving or self-induced nervousness, I perceived the nature of the western coast for the first time. It filled me with an emotion that I would call sacred, and everything else vanished before it.

The boat rolled along over the troubled waters. Ahead of us appeared more and more clearly the contours of an extensive island sketched against a background of swiftly passing clouds. The nearer we approached this island, the more hotly burned within me the yearning of decades, now about to be satisfied. We landed at the pier, and I took in everything about me with a greedy glance. I saw the wharves, the warehouses, all the little brightly colored buildings crowded together on the slope of bare rock. Boats were bobbing side by side in the harbor, while large quantities of fish lay scattered along the rocks to be dried in the sun. A group of men in yellow oilskin coats, sou'westers and hip boots were visible on a projecting point of land, slowly and pensively at work on a lot of big fish, the like of which I had never, to my knowledge, seen before.

The pungent air stung my face and cheeks. Around me I heard a thunder as of roaring waterfalls lashed onward by raging winds. I saw the outlines of the rocks turn blue and black in the distance, while the storm sent the clouds scurrying wildly across a sky that shone blue through the rifts. But when I reached our little white house, standing at the extreme point of a cape to westward, far from the cluster of human habitations, I beheld the sea for the first time.

I stood a long time gazing at this sea that I had reached at last. When I entered our house, I noticed that the window of my own room gave on the very view I had just left, the only difference being that the sea seemed to have come still closer. Once more I stopped still, unaware of what was going on within myself. But at that moment I caught sight of my wife. She stood alone by the window, looking out. Suddenly it occurred to me that everything that had occupied my thoughts for weeks: all agitation, all misgivings, all stratagems, all calculations, the whole struggle to make my wife share my own feelings — all had been forgotten since I put foot on this rocky island. There she stood now, and I had no idea whether at that moment our thoughts were preparing to clash or to fuse.

Then she turned about, and I saw that her eyes were full of tears. She held out her hand to me, I

took it, and we stood beside each other gazing at the water. The waves flung themselves far up the rocks beneath our windows. As far as the eye could reach, nothing was to be seen but the white crests of waves rising from the black surface of the sea, and little reefs against which the sea was breaking. The waves rose skyward like pillars of white foam, forced ahead by the weight of the whole sea coming in from the west. It was an uproar full of dispassionate power, a tremendous outburst suggestive of the riotous exultation of life itself.

Face to face with this uproar, my own disquiet was laid at rest, while my wife's hand in my own made me feel that both of us had been headed for the sea and had reached it by different routes. We did not speak, but stood there a long time, and our inward conflicts died away. We fell asleep with our ears full of the thunder of storm and waves, and when the thundering ceased, we woke, disturbed by the silence.

Beneath our window the sea lay calm and spacious, stirred only by the measured ground-swell.

Chapter VIII

YEARS have passed since I first recorded this memory. Then I did not know that later I should have to fight another, greater battle with my wife —a battle that would leave me alone and yet not lonely, bowed, but not hopeless.

Now I have a vision of us two sitting on the highest rock outside our friendly white house. In a glamour always new, different every night, the sun descends into the sea, and between us Sven is sitting. He is barelegged and brown, and because it grows cooler toward nightfall, he puts his little feet under mamma's dress. He is begging for permission to stay up as long as the sunlight remains. His eyes dwell in wonder on the last flaming refulgence of the sun that is just vanishing into the calmly heaving sea. He sits with his chin propped against his hand as if steeped in serious thought, for which he can find no words. And when, finally, he must go to bed, he clings about my neck and asks me to carry him.

With this easy burden on my arm, I descend slowly from the rocks, and turning back, I perceive the dark silhouette of my wife against the sky. She sits as Sven was sitting a while ago, and her eyes seek the spot where the sun disappeared and the flames of the sunset were extinguished.

Chapter IX

NEVER had Sven been so admired, patted, petted, and idolized as he was this summer. The pilots carried him over the hills and carved boats for him. The old women stopped and smiled sunnily at the mere sight of him. The young wives forgot their own babies and said that such a child they had never seen. The girls guided him along the rocks and played with him unbidden. Sven lived in constant sunshine, and in that air he grew stronger and more sunburnt than he had ever been before.

In a word, he was the centre of our thoughts and the sun of this, our only summer on the western coast.

Strangely enough, however, this was the very time when he discovered a new topic of conversation to which he returned incessantly. It was peculiar to Sven that he spoke of anything that came into his mind. This he did with less self-consciousness than children commonly show, wholly careless as to the impression he might make on any grown-up person. Otherwise the rule is that children hide to some extent what they think, and speak with a certain reserve in the presence of older people. The reason is that they fear to see the smile of irony directed at their ideas, even

when there is kindliness in the smile. This is particularly the case if a child is more sensitive, more naïve, more frank of mind than other children, or if its nature differs entirely from that of the rest.

From the time he opened his eyes, Sven had never met anything but sympathetic understanding. Arrived at the age which makes it possible for parents to occupy themselves with their children, he was almost constantly watched by a pair of eyes that rejoiced in his every movement, that grasped and responded to his every word, that reflected every expression of his tender and innocent soul more faithfully than he could possibly do it himself. It was through his love that little Sven learned to know the world about him. And because it suited his own affectionately devoted nature, as it suited the person who, day by day, gave him far more than when she merely gave him life, it seemed to Sven the most natural thing that whatever grew or wondered or laughed within him should be voiced as directly and simply as it was conceived.

Perhaps, although he could never express it, there existed also within him a sort of premonition that he didn't belong here. Perhaps this premonition served unconsciously to tie him still more firmly to her who had lived so long with the same feeling buried beneath her joy in life. Who can answer such questions? Who would dare to at-

tempt an answer? Nothing but silence dwells above the flowers that grow on a grave.

Certain it is, however, that little Sven once discovered a picture on the wall of his mother's room. Having watched it for a while he took it from its place and stared at it in silence as if beholding something quite new, out of which his mind could make nothing.

The picture was not in accord with modern taste. It had little art, and it told a tale. "The Procession of Death" was the name of the tale. Death was to be seen stalking across the wide plain. He was dressed in a white cloak that hid the skeleton but left the skull exposed. He was followed by a long train of young and old without distinction. This train was so long that it seemed lost in infinity, and no one could detect its end. Death held a bell in his hand, and you could see that it had just been rung. You could see it because a woman broken with age was sitting by the wayside, her hands raised appealingly to the inexorable one, who was passing her without a glance. A little way from Death stood a couple of young lovers. The bell of death had just rung in the young man's ear, and the desperate arms of love could no longer hold him back. The procession of death must move on, and as the place waiting for him appeared, the young man must take it, and his place on earth would be empty, and no

longing would have the power to call him back. But where the end of the train was lost to sight, a light appeared like that of dawn.

Such was the picture. Mamma had brought it to the island with other pictures and photographs to be used in the decoration of our new home. It was at this picture Sven was gazing when he asked mamma, "What is that?"

Mamma told the tale of cruel death that takes the young and leaves the old who are begging to follow him. And Sven put the picture back in its place.

The next morning he took it down again, and having looked at it a while, he made mamma tell the whole story over again.

Once more Sven listened while his big eyes grew serious and puzzled. "Say, mamma," he asked, "do you think the young man is very sorry because he has to die?"

"Yes," mamma answered, "but the young woman is still more sorry."

"But perhaps he will be an angel," said Sven, "with white wings on his shoulders."

"He surely will," said mamma .

Sven sighed and did not feel contented. "Why shouldn't the old woman go along," he said, "when she wants to so badly?"

"No one knows," said mamma. "Only God knows."

"Does he really know?"

"Yes, he does."

Sven returned to the sunshine and the rocks, but after that he loved this tale more than any other. Almost every morning, when mamma was combing her hair, Sven came into her room, took down the wonderful picture and made her tell the tale.

Something else had happened to Sven, however, and that was during the previous winter. He had been taken to the theatre to see a play that was given Sunday morning, when Sven was allowed to omit his customary forenoon nap. The play was Strindberg's "Lucky-Pehr." Sven did not understand much of the play, but he enjoyed it in his own way, so much so that he communicated his pleasure to those who sat about him.

Then came the scene where death appears to Lucky-Pehr, and Sven grew silent. No one had remembered the occurrence of this scene, or thought that it could make such an impression. But Sven didn't care for anything else after that. And when anybody asked what he had seen at the theatre, his sole answer was: "I saw death. It was a great big skeleton that could talk. And it carried a scythe."

Now Sven combined this recollection with the picture of the procession of death. The only thing he couldn't make out was why death had a scythe on the stage but was ringing a bell in the picture.

Otherwise it seemed as if the memory of the theatre, the image of the picture, and the tale told by mamma became united in the child's mind.

Sven talked of it all the time. The picture had taken hold of his fancy with an intensity that nothing could abate. And to anybody willing to listen he would tell about death who met Lucky-Pehr and threatened to take him along, but had to give up because Lucky-Pehr pleaded so beautifully with him. He told it so that he himself shivered at the very thought, and if death had appeared to him in person, it could not have impressed him more forcibly.

But his friends on the island considered it very strange that a little child like him could talk of such things. They never made fun of him, but what he told served merely to strengthen their sense of something fine and frail which they liked to take in their arms and carry across the rocks.

Nor did Sven let his happiness be disturbed by such tales. He was familiar with them, and they seemed to accompany him as the shadow accompanies the bright sunlight. And he built up a world of his own on that island. When the breakers rushed skyward and the storm roared, he would stand by the window looking at the raging sea; there he stayed for hours, and no one could get him away. When the sky was blue and the wind swept mildly and gently over the island, he would

stroll along the shore all by himself, catching starfish and learning how to play with boats.

Most of all, however, he preferred the place where the pilots kept watch and where mamma sat with her work. There he would ask her to tell him all she knew about the sea. He was overjoyed when he had learned to run barefoot on the rocks, and he would pull up his little trousers and trip along on his pretty feet as cautiously as a little princess. But if the way was long, he wanted to be carried. And as no one could refuse anything Sven asked, there was always some one ready to give him a place on arm or shoulder. Then Sven looked around with pride, smiling in his sense of power and his happiness at being loved by all.

But more than once when his parents were alone, his father would say: "He is stronger and healthier than he has ever been. Why, then, should he always be talking about death?"

And she would answer, "I don't teach him to do so. His thoughts come and go as they please. . . . . Now, look!"

She pointed to the shore. There Sven sat by himself looking very happy and contented. He had a piece of string in his hand, and the string was tied to a piece of wood bearing a slight resemblance to a boat. This he pulled ashore, loaded it with stones, and pushed it out again.

"Can't you hear?" asked Elsa.

To hear better, we approached very carefully, without being noticed by Sven.

He sat very still, letting the piece of wood ride on the waves, and all the time he was singing to himself in a faint, crystalline voice. What he sang was an old chanty that he had learned from the children on the island:

And in the sea his grave was made.

Then he caught sight of us, stopped, and shook his little fist at us, declaring that he would never sing when papa was listening.

Chapter X

I NOTICE that this book deals almost exclusively with our summers. The simple reason is that our sense of being alive was strongest in summer. During the winter we lived in the capital, or so close to it that we could reach it at any time. Then the same thing happened to us as to almost everybody else. The life of the capital caught us in its frantic whirl and reduced the time when all of us could be together and feel our unity. Gone were the long confidential talks between my wife and myself; gone was our pleasant life with the children. Not even our Christmas — that season least of all — was free from the sense of strained hurry that leaves in its wake fatigue, repulsion, and discord. Therefore we looked to the summer as to a liberation from something evil, and leaving the capital was always like a renewal of ourselves and of our life in common.

I shall now tell about our last summer — the last one during which we really had the sense of living — the summer that turned out so differently from what we had hoped and expected.

This time we chose a place totally different from the islands of the west coast. We did so because my wife wished to surround herself with everything she had missed the preceding summer.

Whatever hold the sea had got on her, she nevertheless retained a sort of grudge against it, because it wills to rule in solitary majesty, permitting no tall trees or flower-strewn grass-swards to grow in its immediate proximity. At heart she always longed for leafy dells and flowers in abundance. Thus the victory won by me on behalf of the sea was not complete. The result was that we decided for the future to take turns in picking the spot for our summer outing. Furthermore, we wished to share this particular summer with others. We wished to revive what had filled our hearts during a time when our own happiness found its reflection in a circle of dear friends that came and went in our home as if it were their own.

To make the contrast to the previous summer as striking as possible, we chose a large island just outside Stockholm, and there we made our summer's home in the upper story of an old manor out of repair.

The place had many large rooms. It had windows out of plumb, soiled wallpaper, and huge old-fashioned verandas. One of these was long and narrow and turned toward the front yard. From the other one, which was smaller and overlooked the garden with its unswept gravel walks and its untrimmed berry bushes, one had a view over the tops of an oak grove to the point of land far beyond and the quiet glittering bay that was

framed in green leafage and had the appearance of an inland lake in the richest part of central Sweden. The verandas on both sides of the house were almost overgrown by wild grapevines, but one side of the veranda facing the water was wholly covered by honeysuckle. You had the impression that the whole place would soon be overgrown, buried, swallowed up, and reclaimed by nature. When you sat in dreams on the smaller veranda, gazing across the garden toward the oak grove and the unruffled bay, it seemed natural to think that all the work of clearing and building about the place would disappear, and that a day would come when new people would find buried in the soil what had once sheltered the joys and sorrows or nourished the bodies of long forgotten human beings. To a person who sat there drinking in the mood of this place, whose productivity was of the past, such thoughts would come with a gentle melancholy quite free from any sense of dejection. To such a person it might seem as if the greatest happiness on earth would be to stay right there until the house collapsed and the weeds overpowered all cultivation, and then to fall asleep in company with the ruined structure and the ancient trees now crumbling to pieces from decay and old age — to become one, in a word, with the barren soil that also seemed tired of yielding the required sustenance for its inhabitants.

Here lilacs grew in solid masses, laburnums swung ponderously and gorgeously above unkept beds where over-ripe peonies drooped toward the ground, and rosebushes contended with each other for air. Here was everything my wife loved in the way of atmosphere and nature. Here existed a sort of doomed and melancholy fertility that was attuned to the life of her own soul. Here she moved about from the first as if she had been always at home. Here we forgot that she had noticed symptoms of her old illness. Here we forgot that life and men had inflicted dread wounds on us, and that we had struck back in defense. Here we forgot the restraint of the winter and its enervating pleasures. And across the bay we had friends between whose landing place and our own the boats travelled busily. Yet the environment lay heavily upon my mind, and I felt it a hindrance to my work. It submerged me in a mood different from anything I had previously experienced. But time passed, and with its passing came peace. The genius of work seized me with theretofore unsurpassed intensity, and nothing but Sven disturbed me.

He was the only one who could never learn that papa should be left alone at his work. He opened the door very quietly as if to show how well he understood the importance of absolute silence. If I looked at him, he put one finger on

his lips and said "hush" with an expression so authoritative and so ingenuous that I simply had to put my pen away. But if I did not look up, he tiptoed softly to the writing desk and stood beside it. He could stand there patiently any length of time; and if I was strong-minded enough to pretend not to notice his presence, he would sometimes leave again as silently as he had entered. This happened very seldom, however. If I turned my head ever so little, I would see his blue, expectant eyes trying to meet mine, and then I was lost.

"What do you want, anyway?" I would ask. I felt that I ought to look very stern, but I knew that I could not.

It was always some flower or stone or other rarity he had brought. And I surrendered unconditionally. I put pen and paper aside and let Sven disturb me just as much as he pleased. Now I am very glad I did.

Chapter XI

IN these surroundings little Sven sang as he had sung all winter; and it was mostly for his sake, I believe, that Elsa for once insisted on having our piano brought to our summer home.

Ever since mamma discovered that Sven could sing, it seemed natural for her to begin developing his talent, and she was proud of his voice as of everything else he said, or did. She got him little song books and helped him to learn the words by heart, as Sven was only a little more than five years old and still far too young to read. And his mother vowed by all that is precious and holy that a long time should pass before he was plagued with anything so terrible. But he knew how to sing, and he knew many tunes. It happened rarely that he confused a tune, and if he did once in a great while, he looked very annoyed and started right over again.

Nor was he timid about singing in the presence of visitors. As many might listen as cared to. Sven sang and smiled, and his big blue eyes beamed. Why should he be afraid of singing when he found it so jolly, and when he sang well anyway? Mamma had told him he did, and if she thought so, everybody else must think the same.

Of all the charming songs that Sven knew, none was prettier to hear than this one:

Bah, bah, white lamb,
Have you any wool?
Yes, yes, baby dear,
I have a bag full.
Sunday coat for father and Sunday skirt for mother
And two pairs of stockings for wee little brother.

The last line of this song was the best thing Sven did. The moment he reached it, he began singing faster and faster, as if he wanted to swallow the last word in order to have it to himself. "Wee little brother" came far ahead of the piano accompaniment, and the reason was that he regarded the two pairs of stockings as his own, and the whole line as a reference to himself. And why should the song not be written expressly for him who could sing and took such pleasure in it?

No one else was permitted to sing that song, and no one else knew how to do it as Sven did — he who was Little Brother when alive, who was Little Brother in death as well, who was never anything else, and who will always live under that name.

. . . . . .

The windows in the living room are open. The fragrance of lilacs is carried in by the evening breeze. The sun is setting, and its last rays sparkle on the wall above the open piano. Mamma is at the piano, dressed in white, and the rest of us

stand around her, while in the midst of us little Sven is singing:

Sunday coat for father and Sunday skirt for mother
And two pairs of stockings for wee little brother.

It is Saint John's Eve, and Sven is happy. Mamma has promised that this evening he need not go to bed until he wants to. It is far from him to desire anything of the kind, of course, and with his hand in mamma's he walks the garden paths like his brothers and all the grown-up people until his eyes close of themselves and he is carried asleep to his bed, quite unconscious of his disappointment at not being able to stay up any longer.

There he sleeps with his best friend on his arm —the little white wooden dog, which has wool like a lamb and eyes made of black pins, and which Sven has named Woolly. There is no more peaceful bed-fellow than Woolly. He disturbs nobody.

But from the tops of trees outside the first faint chirping of birds heralds the dawn.

Chapter XII

I DON'T think Sven ever lived in a more complete communion with his mother than during this summer, or perhaps I had never before had such a chance of observing him. One of the reasons was probably that this summer, for the first time, we had to miss the company of our eldest boy, Olof, who had been sent northward to breathe forest air and become used to being away from home. The result was, of course, that the rest of us drew more closely together than usual. It is a fact that, during this summer, I began unconsciously to look at Sven with his mother's eyes. Never before had I been so struck by the difference between him and all other children I had known, although nothing about him failed of what is generally called childishness.

I remember once being surprised on my morning walk at seeing him sit all by himself on the lawn, with a bunch of bluebells and buttercups in his hand. I asked him if he cared to take a walk with me through the park. This was an invitation which, as a rule, he accepted with delight. Great was therefore my astonishment when he refused energetically.

"Don't you want to go with papa, Sven?" I

felt a little hurt at what I regarded as a mere whim.

Sven shook his head and remained sitting where he was.

"But why?"

"Because I am waiting for mamma," was Little Brother's decisive rejoinder.

"Don't you know that mamma won't be out until later? She is not so well as she used to be, and she must sleep late in the morning because she cannot sleep at night."

This was really the case. If it had not kept us from enjoying the summer and our happiness, this was merely because, in the course of time, we had become so accustomed to the periodical return of my wife's ailment that it seemed to us a natural and commonplace thing.

Arguments had no effect on Sven, however, who remained obstinately seated as before. "I *know* that she will come *to-day*," he said.

I smiled at his assurance and passed on, thinking less of his prediction than of this all-consuming childish devotion that far outstripped his years — a devotion that caused him to remain inactive with a few flowers in his hand, merely in order that he might be sure to greet his mother the moment she appeared.

As I walked along, I happened suddenly to turn about, and then I caught a glimpse between the

jasmines of my wife's white hat and her skirt of bright flowered stuff. At the same moment I heard Sven utter a wild whoop.

Smilingly I retraced my steps and saw the boy clinging to his mother's neck in a paroxysm of affection. I called to them, but Little Brother would not let go his hold. He clung to the place he was always striving to reach, and while I was still some distance off, he yelled at me with a mixture of irritation at my incredulity and triumph at being in the right, "Do you see that she came! Do you see that I knew!"

"I suppose you took a look inside," I said.

Words cannot describe the contempt for all rationalistic interpretations of his feelings and intuitions that Sven put into his reply, "No, I didn't. Did I, mamma?"

And mamma assured him consolingly that he had done nothing of the kind. But to me she said: "You can't believe how many times the same thing has happened. It is as if he felt my coming in the air. Children *have* that faculty at times, you know."

Chapter XIII

TAKING it all in all, however, Sven was not entirely himself this summer. Without apparent cause, he would suddenly declare himself tired, and then he wanted only to lie on the grass with his head in his mother's lap. Or he came to papa with a request to be carried. Then papa put Sven on his shoulder and carried him through field and forest, and never was his glance more grateful or his slender white hand more tenderly caressing.

Then he complained of headache and was given medicines. And then he would not get up mornings, but said he was too tired. As nothing seemed to be the matter with him, papa would take him out of bed and tell him that he must dress and get out in the open air. Sven did as he was told, and while papa remained in the room, he tried his best to get into his troublesome stockings. But no sooner was papa outside the door than he stole over to his mother and begged leave to crawl into bed with her.

Mamma, of course, could not resist such a request, and never was Sven more happy. There he lay with his head on mamma's arm, closing his eyes and remaining very quiet until his strength began to return. Then he got up again, but before doing so he fixed his marvelous eyes on mamma.

"Don't tell papa, please!"

"Why not?" mamma would ask.

"Because then papa will get mad."

All this seemed so strange to mamma that she might have promised Sven anything, and so she promised what he asked. And Sven started out happy and contented because mamma would not betray his disobedience, and because he and mamma stood together.

But when mamma had to go away, or even take a walk without him, he was in despair. There were no limits to his sorrow, and his crying was so heartbreaking, that you were forced to offer him all the consolations that could be invented. In fact, the sight of his passionate grief was so painful that you couldn't forget it for a long time. One morning we discussed this matter. I had persuaded my wife to join me on an excursion to the city in order to dine with a couple of friends and to get out a little, as the saying goes. I had done so chiefly because I thought she needed a little absence from Sven.

We succeeded finally in forgetting the impression of the boy's crying, and we spent a pleasant day in the city, as we always did when we knew that we didn't have to stay there. The fun was at its highest when my wife asked me in a whisper, if I should dislike very much that she took an earlier boat for home. We did not get out very often for

a good time; so the suggestion was not much to my taste. I pointed out to Elsa that we had made it clear that we would take the last boat home, so that no one would be expecting us earlier. In a word, I made every objection I could think of. Finally I tried what I regarded as my chief argument, "Sven will be in bed before you can get there."

"It isn't that," she replied. "I simply want to go home." She gave me a pleading look, and, of course, the outcome was that she left earlier than I.

In the meantime Sven had been playing at home all the afternoon. But when his usual time for going to bed approached, he disappeared without leaving a trace behind. Our servant girls were not of the kind that take things very much to heart; and when they had called him once or twice without getting an answer, they resigned themselves to the thought that he would probably appear when it grew dark, and that master and mistress would not be home until later anyway. Consequently Sven was permitted to follow his own inclination. Toward eight o'clock he made his way to the pier where the steamer landed, and there he sat all alone. He didn't know exactly when the steamer was due, and so he had to wait a good long while. But he sat there patiently and silently, and while the steamer was still far away and had many other landings to make, his mother caught sight of him.

He looked so small and forlorn, his little green crush-hat clearly visible against the blue water.

The whole thing seemed very strange to her, as if she had known in advance that he would be sitting there, and her eyes clung all the time to the little figure seated on the bench at the pier, with bent back and drooping head, as if in deep thought. But when the steamer arrived, and mamma was about to go ashore, Sven stood excitedly in the middle of the pier, staring and staring as if his very life had been at stake. And as mamma came in sight, it was hard to tell who was the happier; he, who had not been sitting there in vain, or she, who had found her little boy waiting for her.

"But how did you come to be here?" mamma asked, in the midst of her rejoicing. "I was not to get back until late to-night."

"Oh, I knew you would come," said Sven. His eyes and voice were full of surprise at his mother's not understanding such a simple thing. "I knew, of course, that you would come, and so I just sat here and waited."

In reply to mamma's question whether he had been there long, he said: "Of course I have. Otherwise Hannah would have got hold of me, and then I should have been obliged to go to bed."

Mamma said nothing more. It never occurred to her to reproach him for having been, strictly speaking, disobedient. His innocent love, which

was the cause of it, shielded him from any reproaches, and this he knew perfectly well. He looked sidewise up at mamma and smiled. "I fooled Hannah. I crawled behind the bushes so she couldn't see me."

"Did you, really?" said mamma.

She and Sven walked home together happy as two accomplices in a successful crime, and the result was that he was put to bed that night by mamma herself — an occurrence that was not so very rare anyway, although he was six years old and on more serious occasions was called a "big boy."

How long it took when she was helping him to undress! Easily and gently she pulled off his garments. Most carefully she washed his frail limbs, and the drying took an unusual time. But when the long night-shirt was on, the rest was easy. For a while she sat with the boy on her lap, dreaming of the time when he was very small and still got his sustenance from her. And when he was to go to bed at last, he never wanted to say his evening prayers. He invented a thousand tricks to prevent his mother from leaving him. But when the prayers were said, he put his arms about her and whispered, "It is so nice when you help me, for you never hurt me."

Elsa bent still more deeply over his bed and whispered in reply, "I shall always help you. I'll

let no one else do it. Always until you can help yourself."

She thought herself richly rewarded for having interrupted her pleasure in order to get home, and when I arrived by the last boat, she lay awake in order to tell me all that Sven had said.

After a merry day with my colleagues, the little traits related about the boy had a greater effect on me than they might otherwise have had.

"Do you know that a great and good man once used the selfsame words in telling me his impressions of his mother's death?" I said. "He, too, was about six years old, and it was a question of the same thing — changing clothes at night. He used the very words: 'Until then no one had hurt me.'"

I stood by Sven's little bed, looking at him a long time. There was a suggestion of hollowness about his temples. But he was sleeping soundly, and so I bent down and kissed his forehead.

We tried to change the subject, but the thought of the boy so filled my mind that I could give my attention to nothing else.

"Has this ever occurred to you?" I asked. "I can think of Olof as a grown-up person, as mature. And of Svante, too. They are quite different, and yet this applies to both. But Sven? Can you imagine him grown up? Where will you place him in this world? Where will he fit in except with us?"

My wife smiled with a sad expression that produced a net of infinitesimal wrinkles about her mouth. "It's a thing I have often thought about," she said. And in pursuit of her own reflections she added: "That is the reason, perhaps, why I love him above everything else in the world. More than the other boys. More than you. I have often thought of it, and I know that if one of the big boys died, I should never cease to mourn for him. But I think I could bear the loss for the sake of you who remained. If you should die — I have never dared to think of it. But if Sven were to die, then I could not live either. I have often thought of telling you, for I wanted you to know it."

She held out her hand to me, and her eyes sought mine as if she wished to apologize for thinking herself able to live without me. When we had turned off the light, I lay awake a long time repeating her words in my mind. I fell asleep believing that I should never know whether or not she was telling the truth.

Chapter XIV

SVEN became so ill that he had to be put to bed. Although we knew his case to be fairly serious, he had so little temperature that we never looked for any real danger. I went on writing busily, and my wife sat by his sickbed, holding his hand and telling him stories when he was strong enough to listen.

The doctor told us that the boy would be ill a good while, but otherwise he felt very hopeful; and as I had long had a journey in mind, I went away for a few days, feeling pretty sure that the worst would be over on my return. I spent three whole days with some dear friends, and I enjoyed both friendship and the beauties of nature without experiencing any considerable degree of anxiety. But when I had boarded the train to return by way of Stockholm to my home, I was seized by an anxiety I couldn't control. Just before starting I had a talk with my wife by telephone. I heard her voice in the distance trembling with joy: Sven was better! He had sat up in bed, laughing and prattling. He had had something to eat, and he had asked mamma to remember him to "the old man," which was his particular pet name for me when he was in very high spirits. The outlook seemed

excellent, in other words, and yet I could not rid myself of anxiety.

It was ten in the evening when I reached Stockholm. I arrived at the very minute when the last boat left for our home. Therefore, I went straight to the hotel where I used to stop. It was dark, and the rain was pouring down. I entered the lobby quickly, suffering from the sense of being a complete stranger that always overtook me when I was forced to visit Stockholm in the summer and knew I should have to be alone. Before I had time to ask for a room, the head porter came toward me and asked me to ring up a certain number at once.

I did so, and was merely told that the doctor had left for my home, and that I must take a cab and follow immediately.

The blow was so heavy and so sudden that it paralyzed me, and the more feverishly I stirred about the more automatic my own movements seemed to me. I ordered a carriage, and as I did so, it occurred to me that I ought to eat a little.

"Sven is dead," I thought. "He won't live until I get home. I must not arrive hungry and tired. I must be able to keep awake and console my wife."

All this passed through my mind while I was waiting for the carriage. I could see myself as if I were another person. I could see myself putting meat on a plate, cutting it, and trying to eat it.

All the time I could only think of one thing, the carriage that didn't come. God in heaven! That carriage never came, and at home my boy was dying, and I couldn't reach him.

I paid the bill and returned to the lobby, where I strayed back and forth, incapable of sitting still, incapable of a single clear thought. "One of my children is dying," I said to the head porter. "That's why I am so nervous."

I tried to smile at him in order to make him understand that I recognized perfectly the senselessness of my own behavior. But I could feel my smile turning into a grimace, and I didn't wait for his answer. I merely continued walking with my watch in my hand as if trying to make the time go faster, and when the cab arrived at last, I felt sure that it was all over. I did not understand why I was sitting in that vehicle, or why I should be driving through the downpour, but I said to the driver in the same automatic way as before: "Drive as fast as your horse can run. My little boy is dying. You won't regret it."

We had often had the same driver.

"Is it the nice little boy with the beautiful face?" he asked.

His simple words called me back to reality. A tide of warm gratitude toward the young man on the coachman's box swept through my heart. "Yes," I said, chokingly, "it is he."

I sat back in the carriage with a sense of having found a man who knew what was at stake and who wished to help me. As we flew through the streets, I spoke to myself in a low tone, and cried, half in joy and half in sorrow:

"He is so beautiful and so sweet that even a man who merely has seen him enter a carriage remembers it and has to speak of it. And he must die. Millions of children are permitted to live. Why should my child die?"

Never did I travel faster by carriage, and never did the way seem longer. I saw the sparks from the horse's hoofs fly through the darkness. I noticed that it was raining less heavily. I watched the landscape sweep by like a phantasmagoria. All the time I was muttering incomprehensible words to myself, not knowing how they happened to drop from my tongue. It was as if, through the darkness, I had been carried toward the thing that must befall, and I asked nothing but delay — nothing but that he should live till my arrival, so that I might once more feel his arms about my neck and hear his voice.

Onward we flew — onward at a maddening speed. The carriage jumped from one side of the road to the other. But it never occurred to me that anything might break, or that we might be upset. A fine fellow, that driver, I thought; he

remembers my little boy who is so pretty and sweet, and who must not die.

"It is a father and his child," I said aloud to myself. *Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind.* Unconsciously, I was quoting poetry to myself. A spasmodic sob contracted my throat and made me choke. To get air, I leaned out of the carriage and studied the scenery. I knew every view, every turn of the road. The shaking of the carriage as it passed over rocks now told me that we had entered the short side-road leading up to our home. With every sense alert, I tried to penetrate the darkness, and I perceived the shadowy form of a cab standing in the front yard. The doctor was still there! The doctor was still there! Then I heard the voice of my wife from the veranda, "He is coming! Thank God, he is here!"

In a few seconds more I had climbed the stairs and stood in the living-room.

I was in the room, but my agitation was such that I could make nothing out of what I saw. I had a sense of the doctor's presence, and I could feel my wife clinging passionately to me. It was clear to me that she looked happy, more than happy, and that I ought to do the same. I heard something about a fainting spell that was over and that meant nothing in particular, the doctor hoped. But I was incapable of saying or thinking anything. This piece of good fortune came so unex-

pectedly that it could not rouse me from the terrible numbness that still possessed me. Mechanically I pulled off my gloves and my overcoat, and yet I remained standing on the same spot as if trying to accustom my eyes to the brilliancy of the lighted room.

"Don't you want to go in?" my wife asked. "Don't you want to see him? He is still awake." Her voice sounded slightly reproachful, as if she couldn't understand.

"Yes, yes," I said. And still unconscious of what was really happening, I walked into Sven's room and saw him lying in his bed, looking up at me. "Don't you know papa, Sven?"

"Yes," replied Sven, with a suggestion of surprise in his voice. He could not understand why all the grown-up people looked so disturbed and miserable. He reached out his little hand to pat me, and I saw how thin and transparent it had become.

As I stood there leaning down over the boy, I realized at last that my child was still alive. I placed his hand over my eyes, and I felt a weight dropping from my chest and a veil withdrawn from my vision.

Chapter XV

THE time that followed was singularly full of hope, anxiety, despair, misgivings. The doctor had foretold a long period of illness. Therefore, we prepared to wait in patience and we really tried to practice this virtue. During the next two long weeks Sven's illness became a part of our customary every-day life, as always happens when illness takes up its abode in a home. Every morning I worked at my book, without letting myself be disturbed. Every day my wife divided her time between Sven and me, sitting in his room because he felt at ease when she was near, and stealing out when he fell asleep, so that she might get a little fresh air and tell me about all the promising indications which her vigilant eye constantly seemed to discover. Svante was left to himself and kept very silent. Now and then he rowed across the bay to tell his friends, the little girls, that Little Brother was very sick and that everything was hushed and quiet at home.

We had to engage a nurse in order that my wife might get some rest at night. It was done in spite of numerous protests on the part of Elsa. She was so jealous about the boy that she could not bear to have him ask for or get help from any one else. It was only when she noticed her strength giving out

that she bowed to the inevitable and gave her consent with tears in her eyes.

A few hours after the arrival of the nurse, however, my wife came to me and told me with joy in her eyes that Sven had taken greatly to his new friend. "You can help me, for you are nice," was what he said to her.

Then he closed his eyes and lay still, as was his habit, with the ice pack on his head that always ached, and his little lean hands on top of the coverlet.

One day we were suddenly disturbed by a hand-organ in the yard. As Sven that day had eaten a little, and talked and looked quite bright, we asked if he would like to be carried out into the yard to look at the monkey.

Otherwise Sven always came rushing the moment an organ grinder approached. Breathlessly he would come to beg papa for pennies. It was his joy to give; and when he came with his pennies, looking as radiantly happy as if he had known what it means for a poor strolling player to get money for food, he set dusky faces smiling with a great display of white teeth, and bright brown eyes glistening in response to his own blue.

But now he drooped on papa's arm, looking very tired and small. He was carefully wrapped in a blanket and had socks on his feet. Thus papa carried him in his arms to the veranda so that he

could look out upon the sunlit yard, whence rose the merry notes of the hand-organ.

He looked in a tired and estranged manner at the trees, the front yard, and the cluster of children gathered in the sunlight. And all the time his glance was puzzled, as if he had pondered why these things were not so jolly as they used to be. He tried to draw his lips into a smile when he saw the monkey, which usually amused him more than anything else, and which now clambered up and down the organ, rattling his light chain and making horrid faces as he tried to crack a nut.

But it made him tired to look at it. He grew more and more serious. He leaned more and more heavily against papa's shoulder. It was as if he had been far away, looking down upon the earth's beauties and gayeties, yearning for them, but feeling that they no longer belonged to him. He leaned his head against papa's shoulder, and soon he was carried back to bed.

Mamma herself put him there and adjusted his pillows. "Did you not enjoy it, Sven?"

"Yes, but I am still too tired. I'll be all right soon."

Then mamma leaned far over Little Brother, patting his hair, but unseen by him she held out her other hand in search of mine, which she pressed convulsively.

Chapter XVI

ONE night I sat alone in my room, knowing that next day the doctors would come to pronounce sentence of life or death on little Sven. I knew there would be two of them, because our family physician, no longer daring to rely on his own judgment, wished to consult a specialist. I sat alone, with the lamp lighted and in front of me a manuscript lacking its final chapters.

I bade my wife good-night, saying that I should sit up working.

"How can you work to-night?" she said. There was a shade of bitterness in her tone as if she meant that I was not feeling what she felt. Then she repented, put her head close to mine and said, "You are lucky to be able to do it."

Now I sat alone, every nerve quivering under an upheaval of my soul so complicated and so profound that I can hardly describe it. I hoped in spite of all that my child might live. In fact, I believed it. At the same time I had a sense that now I must write — now or never. I knew practically every word that ought to appear on the sheets lying clean and untouched in front of me. Necessity drove me, and I wrote, filling the white pages one by one and putting them away on the pile of manuscript rising in front of me on the

desk. It was as if the voice of some invisible presence had whispered its command into my ear. I must obey this voice — obey it blindly. I felt impelled by a restless haste, as if knowing that life was at stake.

"To-morrow," said a voice within me. "To-morrow! Who knows what may happen to-morrow? It is possible that your child may die. Then you cannot write. Then the demand on you will be: 'Money, and more money!' You might revise your book, you might improve it, but you could not finish it if your child should die."

My thoughts drove me like lashes of a whip, and already I could see the morning light through the shades mingling with the light from the lamp on my paper.

"Money! Money! You must have money if your child should die and your wife is to be saved."

Through the voices speeding my work I heard a melody which seemed familiar: "Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind!" A father with his child. Where had I heard it before? Where had I heard it? When did I feel that restless haste? It was as if the lash of a whip whistled, as if hoofs struck sparks from a stony road, as if I felt the night air cool my burning head. I wrote and I wrote. And I recalled my mad drive when I thought my child was dead.

Then I ceased to think of my child. I thought

of her who must possess me undividedly if there was to be any hope of her staying with me, once the incomprehensible thing had happened, and Sven had died. I wrote and wrote as no man ever wrote for money — wrote some of the best pages that ever came from my pen. And when my strength failed, I drank — drank deep to keep myself alive.

The sun had been up a good while when I wrote the last lines. Then I sat a little longer as if paralyzed.

I gathered up the scribbled sheets, put them in my drawer, and stole out of the room to listen at the door within which Sven lay. At that moment it was opened, and my wife looked out. I staggered toward her, saying, "It is done."

She smiled at me, and there was a world of happiness in her voice as she said, "He is sleeping so quietly. I don't think there can be any danger."

I left her, and a few minutes later I was asleep, dead with fatigue.

Chapter XVII

BEFORE the end of the next day we knew that there was nothing to be done, and that little Sven must die. The certainty came like a heavy blow, for until then we had continued to hope. We stood in the hallway. The two physicians were silent and grave. My wife's eyes clung to their faces as if she believed that they had not yet said their last word. I looked from one to the other as I put my arm about my wife's waist, trying to pull her away, and I noticed the twitchings on the sensitive face of our friend, the doctor. The professor spoke slowly and in a low voice as if every word cost him an effort. All I could feel was that the inevitable had come, and that I must steel myself to face it. But having conveyed all her misery to me by a pressure of her hand, my wife made herself free from my arm that was about her waist, and wringing her hands so that you literally could hear their bones crack, she cried out, "Tell me that there is hope! Oh, tell me!"

The two men avoided her glance. Then she straightened herself up and said, "He sha'n't die. I'll show you that he will live."

She left us, and silently we watched her disappear toward the sickroom. All of us understood how deeply she felt that every possible hope was

gone, and we understood that this was the very reason why she vowed to snatch him from death —in spite of all. We said good-bye without many words, and I followed the direction my wife had taken—not knowing what to say to her, but in order to be by her side and perhaps to see what I dreaded more than anything else.

I did not find her in the sickroom. I found her in my own room. Her face looked as if turned to stone. She crouched on the sofa, her hand pressed hard against her cheek, her eyes dry and lustreless. She was staring into a great darkness. Her figure, her face, even her hands, showed it. I tried speaking to her. I tried calling her by name. She did not answer. At last I had to leave her to her own sorrow, waiting fearfully for the words that would come when that sorrow found voice.

A long time passed before her silence was broken, and then it was not broken by words. My wife held out her hand to me and pulled me close to herself on the sofa. Then she fell into my arms, and both of us were convulsed by prolonged sobbing that seemed to spring from a single breast. "I am so sorry for you," she whispered. "I am so sorry!"

"For me?" I freed myself and looked up. There was something in her voice that filled me with a foreboding which I would not permit to take the form of thought.

She clasped her hands before me and almost screamed: "You are not asking me to live after this—to live without Sven? I can't do it. I cannot!"

She had put my foreboding into words, and I stood helpless, unable to speak a word.

"Sit down beside me," she said. "I shall not lose control of myself. I'll talk calmly. There is no anxiety left in me. I feel merely how everything is giving way. I am no longer here, although you cannot grasp it because you know so little, and because I have been able to say so little. And why should I tell you before it was absolutely necessary? I have wished to go on living with you, George. I have wished it because I have loved you more than anything else in life. I am no longer young. I am older than you could ever become. But you have never known it. You have never wanted to see that it was so. And seeing you happy, I did not want to disturb you. But as far back as I can remember, I have known that I was different from other people. Within me I have had a craving to die. Can you understand what I am saying now, George? I can hardly understand it myself. When most happy with you and the children and everything that is beautiful, I have always known that one day I must leave it all, and that nothing could hold me back. Willynilly, whether I wished it or not, I must enter the dark-

ness where I belonged. I have had a feeling that something would compel me, something would tell me I must. Do you recall the winter, George, when everything that was dark and depressing came between you and me? Then I tried to write you what was the matter with me. To speak was more than I was able. But I couldn't write either. I couldn't tell you what I wanted to tell, and I remember wondering why you didn't ask me — why you didn't ask me often and insistently, even after I had begged you not to do so. Sometimes I wanted you to ask me. Most of the time I was glad you didn't. How I suffered during that time, George! If you could imagine how I suffered! You came to me, and took my hand, and sat down beside me, and it did not make me happy, as it used to. I knew that day after day I was wondering how I could find a chance to die and leave you. I wanted to take my own life, George. Can you understand that in the midst of my happiness I wanted to take my own life? You were nice to me, and kind, and pleasant, and I felt as if I were a faithless woman, playing you false. And do you know why I wanted to leave you? Because I knew it must happen some day, and for this reason I preferred to go while you were young and strong and could forget me quickly and become happy with another woman."

She remained silent a moment, her eyes brim-

ming with tears. Then she resumed, and it was as if she spoke with a new voice:

"Then came little Sven, and everything changed. Do you remember, George, that I told you so at the time? Do you remember that I told you? I believed that God had sent him to keep me alive, so that I could make you as happy as I wished, and every night I prayed to the Lord that I might. I really believed that God had heard me, and it was this I talked of with little Sven, when we were alone and no one could hear what we said. But now, George, now he is leaving me. I know now that all the rest of it — all that you have never known until now — must return. And now I only want you to forgive me for all the sorrow I have caused you before and for all the sorrow I am causing you now. But you must not ask me to stay. Where Sven goes, there I must go, too."

At that moment she seemed greater to me than human beings really can be. I was so completely unprepared for what she had told me, that it seemed as if she had related some dreadful nightmare which I could not transform into reality. But I felt, too, that at the very moment when she caused me the greatest of sorrows, she revealed to me the full extent of a love at sight of which I could only hold out my hands in prayer that it be not taken away from me at the moment it became wholly mine.

"I cannot bear it," I almost shouted. "I cannot bear it. To lose both you and him. You cannot mean that."

Rising noiselessly, she stood in front of me like a Niobe spreading her arms to shield her children against the arrows of the gods seeking them out even at their mother's bosom.

"Let me take Sven along," she said. "He must die at all events. I shall carry him down to the water this evening when all are asleep. It will be such a brief struggle. And then I don't need to torture you more than I already have done."

I placed myself in her way, and with all the strength my arms possessed, I pushed her violently down on the sofa. "Wait," I said. "Wait! You don't know what you are doing."

Her only reply was: "It will be your misfortune, and mine, if you prevent me. Don't accuse *me* when it comes."

She writhed in pain as I held her. After a while she fell into a swoon. I laid her on the sofa, and it seemed as if all that had just been said was a mad dream. I stood a long time looking at her, until I heard her breathing grow slow and steady, and I knew she was asleep. Then I placed a pillow under her head and spread a blanket over her.

The agitation of my mind made me stumble as I walked to the room where Sven lay sick. His right eye was almost closed, while the left one had

become strangely large and bright. I bent over him, took his innocent little hand and carried it to my lips.

"My beloved child," I thought. "Neither one of us can help the other."

Chapter XVIII

WE had moved Sven's bed to the room next to the veranda and opened the doors so that he might hear the singing of the birds and the sighing of the winds. There he lay in his white bed, and when he looked up, it was in the expectation of being kissed; or perhaps he made a movement with his weak little hands, and then we bent over him because we knew that he wanted to pat us.

Svante was walking about on tiptoe in the bedroom, and his heart was full of the mystery that Little Brother must die. He stood looking at him for many minutes, and then he bent down to kiss his cheek. But when mamma was awake again and entered the room, Svante went to meet her and put his arms about her neck.

I shall never forget the look of speechless despair with which she took hold of the boy's head and gazed into his eyes.

"Have you telegraphed for Olof?" she asked me.

I nodded affirmatively, and again I saw her bend over Svante and press him close to herself. Moved by some sudden instinct, I rose and walked out, leaving my wife alone with the child that was well and the one that was dying. As I turned in the doorway, I saw my wife leading Svante to Little

Brother's bed. She sat down on one side of it and made the boy seat himself on the opposite side. Then she leaned down over Sven. But all the time she kept a firm hold of Svante's hand, and I could see her caressing both children without the least distinction.

When Svante finally came out of the room, I went in and took his place opposite my wife. She held out her hand to me over the dying child and said: "Whether it be for good or ill, I don't know. But I shall stay with you. I believe now that it is God's will." A moment later she added, "Svante wishes it, too. I have talked with him."

Incapable of an answer, I bent down and kissed her hand. At that moment neither one of us knew what was good and what was evil.

Chapter XIX

ANY effort to distinguish the days that followed would be futile. I could not even tell their number. Night changed into day, and day into night, and our entire life turned about a single centre: the little room where the air was full of fragrance from the blossoming honeysuckle that covered the veranda outside, and where our little boy lay struggling with death.

Here we came and went, sat down together, slept, ate, watched. Here all that we had lived and dreamed was merged into one vast consuming sense of pain. Here, as the last hope waned, my wife herself replaced the cork in the bottle of musk. She, who wished to die with him, removed the last means of stimulation, lest she should later reproach herself with having disturbed the little one's last moments for the sole purpose that we might enjoy the brilliancy of his big eyes once more.

His right eye was extinguished, dead. The eyelid was closed as if one half of his little head already had ceased to live. But when the left eyelid was raised, that eye shone so much the brighter. It grew big and profound as if already gazing at another world, to which his father and mother had not yet access, and which they could not enter until

the last veil was rent and they followed him on the road where the bell of death is ringing, and where whoever hears it ring must follow, no matter what ties may hold him back on earth.

Here we sat when the sun of day was shining, when the rain fell outside, and when the night lamp in the sickroom spread its faint flickering light over the white bed. And as for little Sven himself, who was the goal of our glances and the object of our subdued conversations — Sven, for whom in the end we wished nothing but freedom from continued suffering: quietly as he had lived, so he lay there to the end, and as my wife bent over him, his tired lips moved, and he kissed her. "Give papa a pat, Sven," she said. "Papa is here."

Then he turned his big tired eye toward me and put his slender white hand against my cheek with the movement of one stirring in his sleep.

Thus we sat the last night, and never were two human beings closer together. We held each other's hands over the child's bed, and we started eagerly lest any sign of life on his face should be lost as he opened his big eye in search of us. We spoke to each other, "Did you see that? Did you see?"

And while we greedily gathered these treasures of memory that would be the only thing left to us, the slow hours of the night passed by, and dawn rose on the bay, the oaks, the old garden beneath our window.

As if through a desire to set Little Brother's soul free to fly along the road where we could not follow, we opened the doors to the veranda and let the fresh morning air stream in. It had rained during the night, and the sun was breaking through rent clouds, while the mist was scudding across the waters of the bay. The sun rose higher and higher, and its rays started the birds singing. This wonderful awakening of all nature carried us away to such an extent that we had to exercise the utmost self-control in order not to disturb the sleeping child.

"Look," said Elsa. "Do you see? All must be beautiful as this when he is to die."

Still the angel of death tarried. Still the child's breathing remained slow and regular. And fatigue overwhelmed us. I almost had to use force in order to make my wife lie down on the sofa beside the boy's bed. There she fell asleep with one hand resting on his bed. As the morning sun continued to rise, I alone remained awake listening to their heavy breathing. A calm resignation descended upon me, and I prayed for an end to our common suffering. I sat thus until my wife rose from her slumber. Then we changed places, and utterly tired out, I fell asleep with my hand resting where hers had rested a few moments earlier.

A couple of hours passed, and the sun mounted ever higher on a clear summer day. I was waked

by the touch of my wife's hand on my arm. "Wake up, George," she said. "Sven is dying."

I could not stay in the room, but went out into the garden. Thinking that I might bring him a last pleasure — he had always loved flowers — I picked the most beautiful rosebud in sight, went back to the room and put it on my boy's pillow, beside the eye that still could see. Then I went out on the veranda, incapable of enduring it any longer. From there I heard Svante enter the room and sit down by the bed. But I did not turn around. I walked back and forth, listening to that drawn-out, dreadful breathing that seemed to come from a grown-up person and that cut me to the very soul. Then I heard my wife utter a sound that caused me to turn.

Sven had opened his eye and caught sight of the rose. He reached out his hand and picked up the flower as if wishing to have a last glance at it before he let it fall back on the pillow.

Suddenly his whole body was shaken by horrible, prolonged paroxysms. They began at the head, which became twisted to one side, and then they passed through the body into the limbs, which turned stiff and blue. My wife inclined her head to escape the sight. But when the attack ceased, she was crying quietly, and once more she held out her hand to me over the little bed.

Thus we sat until his breathing ceased . . . .

was resumed . . . . became deeper and stronger . . . . and ceased again. No sound was heard. The silence of death reigned. Bent and weeping, we watched the last fluttering of the soul that already had taken flight.

We had held one of his hands each. Simultaneously we let the cold hands drop down on the coverlet.

Then my wife left the room to seek rest. But I sat there alone and noticed with horror the silence that had fallen upon everything.

. . . . . .

Olof arrived that afternoon. On his return from his first visit to the outside world, he went with his father and mother to the bed where Little Brother lay dead. There he cried in a quiet, manly fashion. But when he was back in the livingroom again, Svante came with earnest face to show one of his fingers.

There was a deep mark in it, and Svante described how it had been made by one of Little Brother's nails just before he died. That mark remained several days, and the boy missed it when it was gone.

Chapter XX

A LITTLE yellow coffin stands on the very spot where, not long ago, stood a bed with a living child in it. Now the room is decorated with roses. One sees practically nothing but roses. Then a lonely woman enters through the door.

She carries a child on her arms, and the child is dead. She does not want any one but herself to touch her darling, and with trembling hands she places the little body in the coffin. On his arm she puts a little woolly dog that used to be his bedfellow when he was well and full of gayety, and no one thought of death. Woolly is to accompany his master. He is a peaceful bedfellow and disturbs nobody. Then she makes sure that her boy lies easily, and she fixes his bed as if he had just said his evening prayers, and she had come to bid him good-night. She looks at him as if her heart were near bursting, and she kisses his cold lips.

Then she goes away, and I stand there alone, holding the lid which I have promised her should be fastened by no one but myself. I turn and turn the screws, and the grinding noise made by the driver as the screws penetrate the wood resembles the sound I should make if I were gritting my teeth with pain.

But when all is done, I no longer feel any pain.

It is as if the agony of the last days had burned out of me any capacity for further emotion, and wherever I look, my eyes are met by nothing but flowers.

I go out on the veranda and smell the fragrance of honeysuckle rising out of the darkness — the same fragrance that surrounded me when I felt my little boy's fingers squeeze mine with the force of death. Everything within me is melted away, gone. I think of her that just left the room, and of all I know to be in store. I feel that I shall never have time to mourn him as I wish — my little boy with the eyes of an angel — and all by myself I kneel beside his coffin: I, who don't know to whom I kneel or to whom I shall pray.

Chapter XXI

THERE is a little grave in the cemetery. It looks like a miniature garden, with a boxwood hedge, a rosebush, and a freshly sodded mound, the top of which is closely carpeted with pansies. It is different from any other grave, and above it a solitary linden spreads its green leafage.

On the mound is a stone, and on the stone appear these words:

"Our little Sven."

There sleeps our happiness, which once upon a time surpassed that of all other people. Beneath that sod my wife's soul is held a prisoner, bound by magic ties, and no love can bring it back to the world above.

PART III

Only what you lose is held forever.

HENRIK IBSEN.

PART THREE

Chapter I

NOT one thing of all that I expected or feared failed to come about. It seemed different merely because, as my misfortune grew by degrees, I continued unwilling to believe in it, even when I had foreseen it and knew that it would come. All of us human beings know that sorrow must come. We never know, on the other hand, how it really will come.

When a sufficient number of days had passed to let me settle down and think over what had happened, the first thing I felt and realized, with a sense of inexpressible horror, was that never had my wife spoken more directly out of her innermost soul than when she sat beside me in my room, saying that she was born to misfortune and that now, when Sven was gone, she would live only to die. Again and again I repeated her words. Again and again they sounded in my ears. The longer I considered them the more sure I became that within her raged a struggle between a real craving to die and her love for me and the children, which commanded her to live. More and more, however, the foremost place in my mind was taken by all that she had said about her love for us, while the dreadful words that spoke of a yearning for

death that bordered on a will to die, were pushed in the background. I saw her torn between the affection tying her to us three that still lived and the mysterious longing that drew her to the one already passed away. We had formerly been united in her mind, and her suffering sprang from the fact that she knew herself incapable of reconciling the hostile forces at war within her soul.

I saw all this. I saw it during a journey to which I persuaded her in order to bring her face to face with the sea and the sun, with new people and new impressions of life. I shall never forget this journey. I shall never forget the sense of hopelessness that laid hold of me as, week by week, I noticed more clearly how everything she saw passed her by as if to her it had no existence. She concealed a great deal from me. She even concealed her tears, and I understood that she did so merely because she perceived that I lived only in the hope of bringing her back to life, and because she wished that my hope should be left to me as long as possible. I understood this one evening when we sat on a veranda gazing at a panorama of Norwegian fjords and mountains. Elsa looked at it for a long time. Then she closed her eyes to what she loved so much and looked away.

"George," she said, "why do you let me see all this, George?" She began to cry softly, but tried to still her tears as she looked up at me. "Why

do you do so much for me? Why are you so kind to me? It would be much better if you let me go my own way."

I felt myself face to face with a suffering that could not be measured or weighed. I felt remorse that I had tried to draw her away from her sorrow, and that I had let her become aware of my purpose. At that moment, any effort to lead her or to influence her grief seemed to me wretched and mean. I drew her close to me and said: "Cry in my arms! Cry to your heart's content; Don't restrain yourself! Don't you know that I grieve like you?"

Tears streamed from her eyes, and yet the face she turned to me was as radiantly happy as if the greatest imaginable good fortune had befallen her. "Do you really?" she said.

The fact that my wife could believe that I already had forgotten or was about to forget, shook me so deeply that my grief found utterance, and I heard or saw nothing but what I myself felt, and what tortured me. I told her how impoverished and old our entire home seemed now that Sven was gone. I told her how I feared to return home and resume my everyday tasks knowing that his bright voice would not greet me or he himself stand hidden behind the door to meet me as I entered. I told her all this, and I could feel how she rested more and more peacefully against my shoulder. I

was happy in the consciousness of how much we still could feel in common. But I understood, too, that her fear of my not sharing her sorrow as she desired, sprang from the fact that, without any word from me, she guessed that all I planned or did, said or thought, became focused in a concentrated effort to bring her back to life.

I thought of this as we sat there. But from that evening my attitude toward my wife was changed, and I myself could notice the change. I became resigned and ceased to expect that she would quickly turn her thoughts from him who had gone away to us that remained behind. This made her more trustful and more frank toward me. But our journey slipped by as if all that we saw were nothing but illusion. We met friends, but no amount of sympathy could awaken more than gratitude in my wife. People seemed to slip away from us as if we had stood within a circle that no one willingly would enter.

Such calm as lay within our reach we did not find until, one evening, we moved into our new home. It was an apartment in Stockholm, for which we had exchanged the country home where we had experienced so much of good and evil. We had made the arrangements before we had any idea that what had now happened could possibly come to pass, and it was with a sense of fear that we entered our new rooms.

Nevertheless it was here we experienced our first days of relief and of peace in the midst of our grief. Times without number we regretted having ever left home, and thus, so to speak, exhibited our sorrow to public view.

Chapter II

IN the cemetery there is a little stone with this inscription: "Our little Sven." It stands on a mound rising beneath a linden tree that has long since lost its leaves. By the trunk of the tree stands a bench. On the bench sits a lonely woman in black, and her mourning is as deep as that of a widow. She sits there a long time in the autumnal light, talking to somebody that no one else can see.

She orders the coachman waiting near the grave to drive back to the road. Then she bends down and gathers some mould from the grave in her handkerchief. Next she produces a piece of black silk, needle, thread, and scissors from a sewing bag. She cuts the silk and sews it together in the form of a little bag. This she fills with mould. Then she presses her lips to the dark mould; and having done so, she sews the opening of the bag together. This she does with close and careful stitches, so that not a grain may be lost, and to the corners of the bag she fastens strong cords. Then she puts away her sewing things and sits there a long time with the black amulet in her hand, thinking that now she is wedded to him that lies in the grave.

At last she kneels beneath the bare branches of

the linden and kisses the stone bearing her darling's name. Slowly and solemnly, as if performing a sacred rite in the full view of many people, she puts the cord about her neck, opens her dress, and places the sacred mould on her own breast.

All this time her face is serious, but bright and happy. Before rising, she kisses the soil at her feet. Then she stops to survey the grave. A forest of potted plants bloom around it, and fresh flowers have been strewn on the mound. No grave is more beautiful, none better kept, none so richly decorated at this time when the fall winds shake the trees.

She smiles with pleasure, and once more she speaks unheard and intimate words to somebody whom no one else can see. Then she makes her way to the carriage waiting at the cemetery gate and drives home.

But when she reaches home, she goes straight to me, takes out the black amulet, and tells me what it contains. She holds it up to me and asks me to kiss it. This I do in order not to disturb her pleasure, and with a happy smile she hides it again in her bosom, with the words, "If you knew how happy I feel when I am with Sven, you would never regret that I go so often. After I have been there, I am at peace for many days."

Then she goes out again, leaving me alone.

When, a couple of hours later, I am through with my work and look for her, I find her in front of Sven's little chest of drawers, turning over the things that once belonged to him.

Chapter III

THUS her thoughts are constantly circling about him who is dead, and there is nothing that can deflect them. She talks of following him soon, and she does so in a quiet, rational, confidential tone, as if it ought to be a natural thing to others as well as to herself. Sometimes she adds: "I should only like to live until the boys are a little bigger and don't need me any longer."

At such times her face takes on an expression of desperate agitation, as if she knew her wish to be beyond what she could hope or demand. Her forehead becomes contracted into a deep furrow between her eyes, as if her brooding caused her pain. She feels that, in her desire at least, she must make a choice between life and death, and that she cannot do so. Therefore she wishes first to live a while, in order that she may do all she can for those that live. Then she wants to die in order to stay with him to whom she feels that she belongs. She seeks a reconciliation between her wish to die and her need to live, and she fears both because the two desires struggle for mastery within her soul, and each in its own way brings her infinite torture. At the same time, however, she can foresee which of the spirits must conquer in the end, and this she tells, not as something extraordinary

that ought to call forth astonishment and awe, but as something natural which she has experienced and which no one can doubt.

"Do you remember my saying that I didn't believe in another life?" she asks. "It was you who gave me that idea." Her face darkens as she speaks, and her voice carries a suggestion of resentment that hurts me. This she sees, and she puts her hand consolingly on mine as she goes on:

"Now I believe in such a life. Now I know that you may begin to live it while still on earth. Let some one only pass away to whom you are attached, and you feel as if your soul had followed. Sven comes to me almost every night. He does not come at my will, or when I ask him to come; nor when I cry, and yearn, and reach out my arms for him, and call his name. But when I least expect it, I see him sitting beside me. And if I remain very quiet and happy, then he smiles at me and looks pleased. He looks at me exactly as he used to do, and before I have time to pull myself together, he is gone. Yet I am happy afterwards. I know that he has been with me. He has come many times when you were sleeping and I lay awake. More than once I have thought of waking you. But I have never dared to do so. I was afraid that he might be gone when you waked up, and then perhaps you would not believe me when I told you what I had seen."

All the time she looks at me timidly, as if afraid that I might contradict her. This I never do. I don't know myself what I believe. I have passed through disturbances so terrible that I dare not say what may be reality, and what illusion, in the experiences of other people. Can I even know it about my own? How do I know that only what my reason can grasp is real? Is it not conceivable that there may be a reality which can be produced only by our emotions, or — why not — by our imaginations? It seems as if I were mutilating myself by making my emotion and my imagination exist only to be subjugated by reason. The analogy occurs to me of letting my eye deny a physical pain because it is invisible, or of letting my ear question the sensations of taste because they cannot be heard. And no matter how well I know the arguments advanced against such a course of thought, I find it impossible to apply them to the present case. I neither believe nor disbelieve. I seem to be walking about in a distressing expectation of light to come on something I don't know.

In the meantime a thought is growing that has sprouted ever since I knew that my child must die. I understand that, no matter whether this be imagination or reality, it must sooner or later rob me of my wife. She has grown to be a part of my own life, and I cannot lose her. Arrayed against my own happiness — which once upon a time seemed

so strong that from its height I could look down upon the happiness of others — stands the force that is the fate of all living things. Death appears to me as once it did to little Sven on the picture which furnished the subject of a much cherished fairy tale. He rings his bell and calls the one that ought to stay, but leaves the one that is not called. The difference is merely that I see Death far ahead and long before he can arrive — that I know his bell must ring, and that she for whom it rings will go gladly.

But I will not be left alone to curse the power of death. Within me grows a desire mounting farther than I know. It is the same desire that caused my wife to say, when crushed down by the certainty of her child's death, "He will not die. He must not die. I know that he will not die."

In the same fashion I now say to myself, "I won't have it. I don't want to lose her. She must live — in spite of all."

I don't realize that I am attempting the impossible. My critical faculty, so alert in regard to her, sleeps when I myself am concerned. I will fight death in order to keep her and my happiness as it once flourished, not when life was nothing but smiles, but when we had taken its chastisement and yet knew that it could smile. I will do anything to win her back. As Orpheus descended to the realm of the dead, so I will use my love to compel her

return, and if she follow, I shall never turn to ogle the shades.

Those are the promises I make to myself, and I don't expect the reward to come quickly. On the contrary, I prepare for a long and hard ordeal, and I know in advance that the first thing I need is the art of waiting.

But my faith is so firm that I almost smile to myself when I hear her speak of death. I hear her say that she is longing to leave, and I feel her endearments when she asks me to forgive her. I rejoice in her caresses and forget her words. I feel it as a tremendous, infinite certitude, that the victory is irrevocably mine, and not his who is sleeping under the sod. In my thoughts, I make him my ally. Entering into her own course of thought, I even tell her that she must live because Sven wishes her to live — that, indeed, he has whispered this into my ear while I slept.

She listens to me with wondering, glistening eyes, and long afterwards — so long that I, for a while, cannot recall what I said — she tells me that Sven sat on the edge of her bed, dressed in his new white suit with the blue scarf, and said, "Mamma must not cry so much for me. My head aches so when mamma cries."

I listen to her words and seize upon them as an omen. More hopeful than ever, I dream of a future when our dead child will prove a stronger

bond of unity than if he had lived, and with tears in my eyes I recall the words she herself once taught me, "To grow old together."

Chapter IV

WHAT I had begun upon was nothing less than a battle with death, and the time that ensued became a constant alternation between darkest despair and brightest hope. Of course, the most difficult thing of all under such circumstances is to maintain the complete passivity that consists in waiting patiently for what may come and leaving everything to time, while simultaneously one has the feeling that whatever happens merely serves to hasten the arrival of a night one has hoped to repel. How anxiously I watched my wife during this period! How I followed her visits to the grave! And how I rejoiced when I saw her calmly and gaily gather the boys about her to read and tell tales for them as she alone could, so that once more I heard their voices mingled in merriment as the reading called out some of those funny commentaries that make it a feast to read aloud to children. And how I watched, at the dinner-table or in the light of the evening lamp, for that strained, preoccupied expression on my wife's face that came like a cloud and struck us all with dumbness.

At such moments it seemed as if her soul had suddenly taken flight and left us to ourselves. The boys exchanged glances with me — glances which plainly revealed that, as far as their age per-

mitted, they understood no less than I, and that they suffered, too, although it might be easier for them to forget such thoughts. Svante would get up and pat his mother, and he didn't give in because he couldn't bring the light back to her eyes. Afterwards he would come to me at times, and say, "I am so sorry for mamma."

That was all he thought of, and for that reason, perhaps, he was a better comforter than I.

Olof kept more quiet on such occasions, and tried to talk with me as if everything were all right. But his eyes were on his mother, and if she went away to be alone, as often happened when she became aware of her inability to look at us and talk to us, then he would steal up to her door and stand there a long while listening. If the silence lasted too long, he would enter her room softly, and if repulsed, as sometimes happened, he came back and sat down with an air of resignation, as if knowing that he could not ask everything at once.

He was in the same situation as I. He would have felt it a great relief if he had only known what to do.

At such moments, when we three sat by ourselves, we would all think of what was happening behind that closed door, where my wife, in her struggle to attain death, was working her way closer and closer to the border line of life.

"Do you know the cause of mamma's trouble?" I asked, one day.

Olof looked away in silence. Svante answered, "Yes."

My question was needless, for that matter, as I knew she had prepared their minds for what must come.

Chapter V

TO dispel my thoughts, and to be able to do anything at all, I used often at night, when I was alone, to write a sort of diary, which I kept hidden at the bottom of a drawer in my writing-desk, so that no mishap might bring it to Elsa's attention.

Now I have read it over, and what that diary contains seems to be written so long ago that I find it hard to believe that less than two years have passed since then. As I read, all that happened is revived and brought near to me again, and once more I feel the torment of the fearful illusion that supported me then.

DIARY

September 4.

I sit here thinking of little Sven. Everything is silent around me, and I seem to see him as, during the last days before he was put to bed, he walked about the paths of the garden with his loving little hand in mine, talking all the time and looking up at my face with his pensive child-eyes. The more I bury myself in this memory, the more unspeakably bitter becomes the hopelessness of never seeing him again. Without knowing it, he was the centre of our home. It was he who always came running to meet us and filled the place with his chirp when any one of us four returned home. It was about

him we gathered to watch his impressions of any little thing that brought him pleasure. Now his father must harden himself against that memory, lest his strength fail in keeping everything else going. Must not even think too much. Nor mourn. Lest all go to smash.

Did he come merely to take his mother away and to leave the rest of us mourning? Or did he come in order to pass out as quietly and beautifully as he did, so that through his death we might learn the great art of living?

October 16.

I have considered everything, and seen through everything, and now I know the issue of the battle. Day by day I have seen things growing worse. And there is no pleasure in comprehending. It is agony. I have watched every detail during this time, and a word or a glance has sufficed to set my whole body trembling, because I knew what it meant. In the presence of myself and my boys, I have seen her forget us in order to hold converse with some invisible being. I have strained every nerve to the utmost in order to wring from her eyes a glance that showed her consciousness of not being alone. I have seen her feel and grasp everything herself — have seen that she foresaw and knew what was lurking within her. She has thrown herself at my feet in anguish, begging me not to send her away, but to have a little patience.

I suffer frightfully from watching this struggle. And yet I know in the midst of it, that what now racks me is merely another aspect of the very qualities in a rich and majestic nature whose waves run high as those of the sea — the very qualities that once brought me life's entire happiness and joy.

October 30.

The awful tension is decreasing. My wife is improving daily. The darkness of winter must some time be followed by longer days and brighter hours.

December 8.

I have not touched my diary for a long time. The reason is that I have been working. I have written a play, and a queer experience it has been.

In spite of proof-reading and other occupations of various kinds, in spite of my wife's illness and a nervousness that has made my whole being tense as a bow-string, I have risen early in the morning to steal time for writing. Night after night I have written until two o'clock. I have used whiskey to keep myself awake. In the midst of this work, I have supped out for the sake of the noise and to see human faces, to plunge into fevered living, to feel it pulse about me and scorch my temples.

The play is ready, and all I feel is a great lassitude. Indeed, what I strive for now is neither glory nor the joy of creation. I feel as if my brain alone had life, at the expense of the rest of my

body. It is too bad that the hours of the day are so few when one is trying to reach the unattainable.

December 17.

Without clearly knowing how, I have the impression that, in some mysterious way, all I have lived and now live, all I have been and am, is progressing toward a wonderful consummation that will take place without my being able to move a finger. In the meantime I am living my customary life, and I don't think anybody finds me changed. I am happy and even jolly, when I get out and meet people. That's a solace.

But here is my real home, where I live my real life. And constantly I feel here as if she and I were being gradually overtaken by something which I once, in another connection, spoke of as being "greater than fortune or misfortune"—something that has no name at all.

My wife is at the heart of all this, of course. I don't know whether she is tending toward health or destruction. It seems to me a matter in which I cannot meddle. It seems to me at times as if I were beyond it, as if I had no share in it and could get none, as if I could never reach it. And all this contains no element of exaltation. It is nothing but a resigned and profoundly colorless yearning.

January 25.

To-day my wife sat down at the piano for the first time. She cannot sing yet, but once more I

have heard music in our home, and the melodies from by-gone days have given a new and brighter tone to our minds. Altogether, something new has come over her lately, something that seems more promising. She has waked up to life, and she is with us as she used to be — or not quite, perhaps. But I feel her coming nearer to us every day. Sometimes I believe her when she declares the reason of it all to be that she knows she must soon pass away, and that this hope supports her. But sometimes I think that, even if now it be as she says, all this is on the verge of a transition into something greater, which she herself perceives with bewilderment and anxiety, but in which she refuses to believe.

The truth of it all I don't know. But I do know that I have lost my former sense of desperation. Now I am living under a fate which is my own, and which, no matter what may happen — as I see it now — cannot touch my life and hers with malice. This is what I feared before.

February 19.

I cannot bear it any longer. Wherever I turn my eyes, there is nothing but black, black, black, so that I cannot look at myself in a mirror without becoming enraged. Fortunately, however, my wife seems to be coming to understand a little of what I feel.

March 26.

My time is spent waiting for the winter to disappear in earnest, so that we may get away from here. A very peculiar sort of apathy possesses me, and there are times when I fear that this winter has finished me. Perhaps what the summer brings may not be worth waiting for either. We moved to Stockholm, or rather, we rented an apartment here, when we thought that this might help us along, however slowly. As it is, it would have been better for us to stay in the country, with the isolation that seems our better choice. We are more lonely here than there.

Sorrow arouses fear.

May 31.

This is our wedding anniversary. *Im wunderschönen Monat Mai.* I cannot forbear to note down a little thing, however childish it may seem even to myself. We have been married fourteen years to-day, and the year just ended was the worst of all. It was the thirteenth — the unlucky year *par préférence.* Now I incline to believe that some one or something is about to make our path smoother, or I feel as if something within me were about to heal. And this for no better reason than that I happened to note a numeral which, under normal circumstances, would probably have passed me by unnoticed.

June 25.

The days slip by while I go about thinking that I ought to start work. But the butterflies of imagination flutter restlessly above something that lies deserted and ruined. At times it seems as if I might follow their flight. Then reality calls me back to *what is,* and the effect is like that of blowing out a candle in a room at night.

If I could merely act so that there was nothing for my wife to notice. If I could keep an even temper, or even put on an appearance of happiness. But I cannot, and I know that she is saddened, not only by her own fate, but by the grief she is causing me. It must be horrible to be in her state, having strength for nothing, will for nothing, and collapsing before the slightest sign of trouble or sorrow; to go about brooding over a death which she believes near, but which does not arrive. It must be thrice horrible, under such circumstances, to inflict incurable misery on the person one loves most of all, and to have no power of relieving it.

At times, when she thinks herself unnoticed, she sits looking at me, and then her face takes on such an expression of despair that it cuts me to the very soul.

Yesterday she sat down beside me and put her hand on mine. "If you didn't have me," she said, "how much happier you would be."

I know that she believed in the truth of her own words. My reply might shake this belief for a moment and lure a glimmer of hope into her eyes, but it could not bring back her conviction of being indispensable and of having to live on that account.

Chapter VI

AS I scan these pages and observe my own vacillation between hope and fear, I cannot understand how what I have written really can be true. And yet it must be, for *scripta manent.* And however incomplete and fragmentary these notes may be, they show nevertheless with perfect certainty, that my hopes then were beyond what I can grasp now, when everything is explained and ended.

This much I understand, that during the winter in question, to the memories of which I cannot and will not return any more, it was my fortune to have found something at last which I thought might help to save my wife. What a fortune such a discovery is! To escape being a mere spectator; to be allowed to participate; to be allowed to act, to work with a definite purpose in mind — a purpose believed at least to be attainable. In youth such a source of happiness may seem poor and humble. But when the years have put a little grey into one's hair, one grows content with much less than before. Then one may endure living and suffering if one only hopes that an improvement lies within the limits of possibility; and in the mere consciousness of such a possibility one may find something approaching happiness.

This help came to me at the very moment when

a long nourished suspicion that city life was injurious to my wife's condition had ripened into genuine conviction, and when, at last, this conviction had produced a determination to take her out of the city and back to the country, which we never should have left. Our physician encouraged me in this decision; and when, for the first time, I mentioned this project to my wife as a mere possibility, her whole face lighted up as if I had promised her the joys of paradise, and she said, "Can you do that for me? Will you really?"

These words aroused me to life and activity. Through all my misgivings, all my worry, all that I have set forth here as crushing me to the ground, these words shone before me as stars out of the darkness, and it was they that goaded me to the great effort which I hoped would bring joy back into our home. The more I thought of it, the more likely it seemed that I had found the "Open Sesame" that would clear the path for my wife so that once more she might belong to life. Like a man who believes that he has found a talisman giving him the power to perform miracles, I staked my entire faith on this plan. And when finally we moved into the little villa that stood on a hill, with a wide view of woods and water, and with the leaves of aspens trembling beneath the windows where my wife could sit watching for me as I returned from my work, then I felt sure of having

found a solution. Strange as it seems to me now, I really felt sure of it. I believed, and that belief made me unspeakably happy.

Nor have I ever felt more hopefully contented than when the snow began to fall this winter, and when we experienced the homelike feeling of being shut off from everybody and everything, which is so characteristic of the northern clime. Our new home stood ready from attic to cellar, and my wife walked among us as in the old days, arranging everything and decorating the rooms with all the little tricks and knick-knacks which women know how to produce as if by magic. The loud voices of our boys resounded once more through the rooms, and there was no reason to silence them. The canaries sang and trilled without having their cage covered up by the green night cloth. The bark of Poodle accompanied the indoor playing and romping of the boys. And the piano was no longer closed.

It was opened one evening when I least expected it. Without a word of her intention, Elsa went into the drawing-room and sat down at the piano. As she passed me, she gave me a glance that made me understand how happy she felt at being able to follow her inclination. After Sven's death, when my wife no longer could hear his clear voice mingling with the notes from the piano, she had never cared to sing the songs to which he alone so often

used to listen. I hardly believed my own senses when I saw her sit down in front of the piano and heard her strike a note. A moment later Grieg's *Swan* sounded through the rooms:

My swan, my Swanwhite,
So still and so silent;
Not a trill, not a carol
Betrayed the singer.

And then the end:

In floods of music
Thy life expired.
Thou sangest dying —
The swan thus revealing.

At no other time, before or after, have I heard this air sung more effectively. While she sang, the boys came in softly, one after the other, and stopped silently by the door. They looked in wonder at me, as if they could not trust their senses, either, and I nodded in response, while my eyes grew dim. When the last note had died away, the room was very quiet, but it was the solemn quiet of a sacred observance.

My wife rose and closed the piano. "That's all I can sing to-day," she said, as if apologizing.

Then she looked at us and understood what pleasure she had conferred. Her face lighted up. Passing me, she went over to the boys, took one on either side of herself and placed their heads against her shoulders. "Be grateful to Little

Brother," she said. "It is he who has helped me."

Her words were free from the usual morbidity. She spoke without the almost hostile tone she used when it seemed to her as if we, the living ones, prevented her from joining him who was dead. She spoke tenderly, calmly, and almost joyously, with an expression as if bidding farewell to a past that would never return.

Chapter VII

OPENING from our bedroom there was a little room originally meant for a dressing-room, but which, for some reason, had remained unfurnished. It was irregular in shape. Its only window was set higher than usual, and it had less light than the other rooms.

There dwelt little Sven. It was his room, and that room was locked.

No one was permitted to help my wife arrange this room or keep it clean. She wished to do everything herself. She put light-colored curtains in front of the little dormer-window. In the recess, behind the curtain, she placed a table. For this table she sewed a cloth out of the same material as the curtains, and on top of it she placed Sven's toys. There was a horse harnessed to a wagon, a few tin soldiers, and a little tent. There was Sven's white cup with a gilded border, his savings-bank, his little sword and helmet. There was everything he left behind, the sum of what he had owned when alive. Under the table stood two wooden horses, one of which had lost its mane, while in front of it was placed a little low wooden chair which had been given to Sven as a present, and which he used to drag around the rooms with him when he felt very friendly and happy, and wanted

to tease mamma into telling him some fairy-tales.

In the midst of these toys stood framed portraits of various sizes, and others were hung on the walls as near the light as possible. Among them were portraits of papa and mamma, of the elder boys, and of the whole family. There was a portrait of Sven in a long dress, and another one of Sven in his little fur coat, in which he leaned against a bench and grinned at the sunlight sparkling on the snow. But all these portraits dated back to our time of youth and happiness, when nothing had yet occurred that might sever the bonds uniting all of us. On a projecting part of the wall, all by itself, hung the reproduction of Spangenberg's picture of death, over which little Sven brooded so often after mamma had told him its story, long before the day when he himself learned more about it than any grown-up person could tell.

One more object was there. It was a little chest of drawers in dark finish which had been given to Sven. It had its own little story, for long ago it used to belong to papa himself. Then it was a bright yellow. Later it passed through many vicissitudes, and finally, on becoming Sven's it was re-painted. Its three drawers held all those mementos of the little one that could not be left about. There lay his last shirt and the last pair of socks he used. There lay his little song books that

were no longer permitted to appear on the music stand in the drawing-room. There were hidden his last white dress with its pretty blue scarf and his white cap with a bow of the same color. There lay his little brown shoes and his books. There lay also papa's own book about the big boys, in mamma's special copy, which Sven begged of her when he wanted papa to write a book "about Nenne only."

This was Sven's room and Elsa's sanctuary. She went there every evening, and every morning she sat there a while before she spoke to anybody else. She was never more happy than when I, too, paid it a visit and stayed there a while.

There dwelt Sven, and what converse was held within its walls, no one knows. Even when Elsa told me something, the words she used were as nothing compared with those that passed between her and the invisible world in that room.

"You don't believe in all this," she said to me one day. "But I can feel it."

"How do you know that I don't believe?" I rejoined.

She gazed at me with large, puzzled eyes. "You cannot believe as I do," she said, "because at the same time you wonder if it can be possible. I know, and I have ceased to wonder."

A memory recurred to me — the memory of a moment when she reproached me for having taken

away her belief in the reality of the infinite. I understood that she needed her present faith; that she always had needed it; that it pertained so deeply and fully to her innermost soul that probably she would have been spared many of her sufferings if this faith had never been disturbed. At the same time I realized that I myself had never quite dismissed the belief in a life after death. I had criticized and scrutinized; in fact, I had even striven to make this idea impossible in my own eyes. But I seemed to have done so largely in the hope that my search itself in the end would bring me a certainty of the opposite kind. This certainty had never come, but with the passing years my thoughts of the hereafter had undergone a change. Of course, the idea of immortality remained to me nothing but a possibility, but more and more it had assumed the form of something kindly and gentle, toward which I drew nearer without exactly knowing why. Step by step, I had come to realize the possibility of such a conviction growing up within me, and my experiences during the past year had brought my emotion closer to this possibility, which my reason still could neither accept nor reject.

All the time, however, I seemed to stand alone in this matter, as if my wife neither could nor would see what was happening within me. And when she spoke those words to me — "at the same

time you wonder if it can be possible"—I was struck by the misunderstanding they showed, as I had said nothing at all. What was it that kept me silent on this subject? What made me forget that what I had to say about this matter undoubtedly would fill her with intense happiness? I wished immediately to make up for my supposed dereliction, and for this purpose I reminded her of the day when she said that she wished to believe as I did, think as I did, live as I did.

"I want you to know it once for all," I said. "Years have passed since then. But I have never asked anything like that of you. I have never asked you to change anything within yourself for my sake. That thought came from your own love, and not from me."

She stood and gazed as if trying to ponder something that lay very far back. "I thought you wished me to become like yourself," she said.

"Never," I replied. "Never have I wished anything of the kind. I wished to be able to tell you what I thought and felt. But I wanted you to do the same with me. And I have regretted that you didn't." I saw that there was something in all this that hurt her more than words could express. But I could not guess what it was.

"I have always believed that you wished me to be like yourself," she said. "I have thought so, and I have said it to other people as well. When

I believed it impossible to talk with you, I talked with strangers."

The last words were spoken in a tone as if they expressed something unconquerably repulsive, of which she felt ashamed. "How was it possible for me to mistake you so utterly?" she added. Putting her arm about my shoulder, she looked into my eyes and asked, "You will not be sorry when I go to join Sven, will you?"

"Sorry?" I must have looked at her with an expression of surprise that could not be misconstrued, for she asked no more questions. Without a word she turned from me and went into Sven's little room. There she stayed a long time, and when she came out, I could see that she had wept, but not in sorrow.

While sitting alone, waiting for her, it occurred to me that never before in my presence had she opened the door of the little room and entered to worship. At the same time I knew that, since the death of Sven, I had never been closer to her than I was now.

Chapter VIII

WHY could not this state of affairs continue as it began? Why must the thing I never feared grow into a more serious menace against me and my dearest than the thing I feared had ever been? You may as well ask why everything does not happen in accordance with man's desire; or why it is not within his power to steer the course of his life in accordance with his own will.

In spite of our mutual devotion and understanding, there was something between my wife and myself during this time that kept us apart. It was not a question of any theoretical difference of opinion. Nor was it such as to prevent us from constantly meeting, constantly seeking each other out, constantly taking pleasure in each other's company. It was simply a difference in our attitudes toward everything that happened to us or passed between us at this time. To her everything was a farewell, in the course of which she came nearer and nearer crossing the border whence no one returns. To me it seemed so many promises that our common life should begin over again, that my wife should return to me, to all of us, to life itself.

From what happened — much of which seemed obscure and inexplicable at the time — I have come

to understand that here lay the fundamental explanation of her fate and mine, the whole explanation of what had happened and what must happen. And I understand, too, that I was saved from desperation merely by my failure to grasp this fact as clearly as I do now. I, on my side, asked that my wife should abandon her thoughts of death and, for my sake, resume the road through life on which she had halted, as if paralyzed, ever since Sven died. She, on her side, desired me to recognize that she had irrevocably taken the first step into the hereafter when her angel, as she called him, passed away. She wished my grasp of this fact to be so profound that I should make it my sole mission to walk by her side as a friend, holding her hand in sympathetic contemplation of the impending darkness that she herself was seeking. We loved each other so deeply that neither one could surrender the dream of harmonizing the other's thoughts with his own. For this reason neither one could let the other go his own way in resigned acceptance of life's portion, that portion called life in loneliness. For this reason neither one could escape a feeling of bitterness on seeing his hope deceived. For this reason she suffered from my striving to lead her whither she would not go, as I suffered from her resistance. And for this reason our entire life became, in the full sense of the term, a life and death struggle for love.

I had lived so long under the shadow of death that I had ceased to regard any other situation as possible. I had grown familiar with it as a chronic invalid becomes familiar with his pains. The shadow was cast upon me not only by the little one who had gone away, but also by her who wished to follow him. It sprang not only from what lay behind us. It waited for us, as well, in what still lay ahead of us, but must come. These two shadows met at the point of life's road we had just reached. These two shadows enclosed my whole life, and my only fault was that I had not the power to tear the sun out of the sky in order to dispel the second shadow.

It was my fault and my illusion. With seeing eyes, I failed to see. With open ears, I failed to hear. I saw nothing but my own desire, heard nothing but my own dream's passionate longing for life. And yet I knew that it is only in fairy-tales a man's will suffices to bring the dead back to life. Even the fairy-tale presents him as offending the gods by attempting the superhuman; and in the realm of shadows he is made to look back in order that she, for whose sake he attempted the impossible, may be restored forever to the night of Orcus.

Chapter IX

SPRING came late this year. In fact, it seemed as if spring, to which I looked as a liberator and a bearer of joy, would not come at all. The ground lay cold and hard. An icy blast swayed the bare branches of the trees outside our windows. Masses of snow poured down as late as the end of April. And when the sun shone for once, it brought a northern wind fraught with the icy air of the frozen Bay of Bothnia.

At this time a cold contributed in bringing my wife back to bed. She was kept in bed for weeks, and during those weeks we feared the worst. Once more silence reigned in our rooms. Once more the boys and I ate our meals in silence at a table where her chair stood vacant. Once more every sound was suppressed within the house. Once more illness struck our hopes dumb.

Contrary to all expectations, my wife recovered. Her convalescence was slow, and she had little strength. This new awakening to life, so unexpected by all, seemed beyond description strange. Yet it was a reality, and when I sat alone in my work-room on the ground floor, the whole house being at rest, I could resume my dreaming of dreams about the summer.

More wonderful than that: soon I was not alone

in dreaming them. As if her recovery from this last illness implied more than a mere return to physical health, we now lived through a period that seemed to bring into harmony all that had been. My wife began to share my dreams. She began to long once more for a life in common with me. She went farther to meet me than she had done since the day we buried Sven. She still was ill and feeble, and she could not talk much. But she could grasp what I said to her. She knew that spring had arrived, and she rejoiced in the spring flowers placed on the table beside her bed.

"How happy we used to be, George," she said. "How happy we used to be!"

There was a note of acute pain in these words that she barely managed to utter. She closed her eyes as she spoke, and tears dripped from beneath her eyelids.

"We'll be just as happy again," I said. I believed what I said, and I took her answer as a promise.

"Yes, yes," she said, quickly. "When it's summer."

She listened to my tales about things that had gladdened our youth, and about the islands outside Stockholm, which had always given us our best homes. "We'll go out rowing among the islands," she said, "and we'll sail in the night wind."

Then she broke out, as if disturbed by painful

memories: "You must forget, and never recall, what I have said to you during these last years. I have been so peculiar that I have not understood myself. Often, often it has been as if some other person were speaking through my mouth, and I could do nothing to prevent it. You have had to do everything, and I have merely accepted. There will be a change in that. If I only get well."

I silenced her and asked her not to talk too much—being too happy to say anything more myself.

"Yes, yes," she said. "I have been silent with you and talked to others. And what are they? Strangers who understand nothing."

She closed her eyes and began to doze. I remained in silence by her bed, looking at her as her sleep deepened. The look of her face had become the same again as when she was little more than a girl and I woke up the first time to watch her sleep. Tears of joy dropped heavily from my eyes, and I felt my own heart thawing while the April blizzard raged over the frozen ground outside.

Chapter X

MY wife was up at last and convalescing. Once more she moved among us, her one thought being to make the rest of us happy, and to feel our happiness at her return to life.

Oh, how well I remember those brief weeks, during which no one saw her but we! How successful they were in making me forget the past! In comparison with their speechless happiness, all our previously experienced worry and sorrow counted for nothing. Every word that was spoken has been written down in my memory and preserved. All the unsaid things, surpassing what life generally has to offer, are now slumbering in my soul, where they provide the fundamental note of a life I could not have lived at all without them. The days that followed wiped out all there was within me of worry, doubt, and distrust. Yes, I had distrusted her, distrusted her love, because she would not let herself be led away from death in order to live with me.

Now all her resistance was gone. I could feel it every moment I sat beside her, in every word she spoke to me. It was as if the illness had set her house in order within her, as if she had returned purged and purified by its agency. Her entire personality returned, and I could sit for hours enjoy-

ing the sight of her face because it was the same as it used to be.

"Do you recall when I told you that we must part?" she said one day.

I had to think hard in order to remember that she had ever said anything of the kind. When I did remember finally, I told her that I had forgotten her words as you forget the talk of a fever patient.

"I meant what I said," she insisted, eagerly. "It seemed as if you were trying to force me into something. And I felt so sorry for you at the same time. You have had such a hard time of it — much harder than I. But you must understand that I have been very ill — far too ill to think of any one but myself. Oh, now it is as if I had waked again."

She took hold of her own head with a gesture of mingled anxiety and bliss. Then she added: "When I die some time, you must look in Sven's chest. There, in the upper drawer, lies a letter I have written. But you must not read it until then. I know anyhow that I shall die soon, and when I die, I shall die just as Sven did."

Many a time I had heard her utter such words, and every time they sent a shiver through my innermost soul. Now they passed me by as if they had never been spoken. I looked upon them as the last echoes of the storm — as corresponding to that steady heaving of the bosom of the sea that

remains when the tumult is over. I smiled in triumphant consciousness of having won her back. Turning her face toward mine and looking straight into her eyes, I said, "But now you wish to live?"

"Yes," she said. "I wish to live for you and the boys, and for the memory of Sven."

That day she walked at my arm along the gravelled path in front of the villa. Her gait was tired and unsteady, and she rested heavily on my arm. But we were contented as two children, and she laughed at herself because her walk was so unsteady that her legs threatened to give way at every step. She laughed a little feeble laugh, that nevertheless was fervently happy and made me rejoice more than ever in supporting her.

"How happy I am again, George," she said, as we returned indoors. "And so you will be, too."

Then I helped her up the stairs. But she must have a look at the boys' room before she entered her own. She stood a long while looking at everything as if it had grown new to her during the time she was ill. "It must have been a hard time for them, too," she said. "I have not had strength for anything. But now I am going to be well."

The nurse helped her to bed. When the boys returned from their playground, she called to them in a feeble, thin voice, so different from her ordinary deep and rich voice, asking them to come in and tell her what they had been doing and what

fun they had had. This they did so thoroughly that more than once I tried to interrupt them. But she would not let me. While they were chattering both at once, she lay gazing at their faces all the time, and listening to their words, as if she needed time to grasp that what she experienced just then was reality and not a delusion. Then she made them come up and kiss her good-night.

"Now I shall soon be well," she said. "And when summer comes, papa will get us a place out there on the islands. I don't need to look it over, or even know where it is, for he always orders things so nicely for us all."

She closed her eyes with a happy little smile and curled up in the bed to go to sleep. When I had seen the boys to their own room, I put on my coat and walked by myself up and down the gravel path where my wife and I had been walking a little while earlier. It was a calm and clear spring evening with a suggestion of night frost in the air.

Chapter XI

WITHOUT quite knowing why or how, I seemed frequently inclined during these days to think of Elsa's and my journey to the west coast. These thoughts brought back the memory of my silent struggle to make her love what I loved, and I was both inspired and disturbed by the recollection of how I had succeeded and failed at the same time.

I recalled that journey when, during the days of convalescence, I sat with my wife's hand in mine and her head resting on my shoulder.

"It is strange how far away I got from you," she said, one evening. "How could I get so far away? It was because I thought you wanted to prevent me from joining Sven."

"But you don't want to do so any longer?" I asked.

"No, no," she said. "Now I want to stay with you. But I have had so many horrid and stupid thoughts during this time." Her voice became so like that of a child confessing some misdeed, that I had to smile when I heard her. "No, you must not laugh," she went on; "because it is the truth. I thought you didn't understand me, and I said so, too. Can you forgive me?"

She spoke with such profound earnestness that

I was deeply moved. To prevent her from becoming still more stirred up, I answered in a tone that I tried to make as gay as possible, "Is that the only sin you have on your conscience?"

"No, no," she said. "But I know of no other one toward you." Then she continued, snuggling closer to me: "But it is the worst thing I could think or say, as I know that no one has understood me except you. Not one of those people I talked to when I felt so lonely and miserable and thought that everything would go to pieces within me."

She shivered as she spoke, and put her hand to her forehead. "It is all over now," she said. "Everything is so peaceful and clear. But there is one more thing you should know." She raised herself up and gazed at me with a glance so deep and bright as if she wished me to look straight to the bottom of her soul. "You should know what was the worst thing of all," she said. "When I thought that I must die and follow Sven, and when I thought this so strongly that you seemed to glide away from me, as everything else did, and the world seemed deserted and empty — then I was frightened, oh, so dreadfully frightened, because I believed that I should be forced to — do it myself! That was the worst thing of all. But now I know that I shall never need to do that. That much God has promised me."

"Do you mean to say that you will leave me

anyhow?" I asked. My own words set me trembling, and I observed that my voice nearly gave way.

"I don't know," she said, leaning her head on my arm again. "I merely know that I never shall need to do it myself."

She became silent, and I could find no words to answer her. I glanced at her. She looked herself again, as I remembered her from the years of our happiness. She appeared more frail and youthful, and the calm superseding her former feverish disquiet colored her every movement with a trustful affectionateness that brought me joy and sadness in the same breath.

When she was in bed and I went in to bid her good-night, she looked at me again with the same deep and bright glance. "Please don't mind my talk about your having taken away my faith. You never did. It was mere imagination. Oh, I have imagined so many things. I fear my life has been nothing but imagination."

A painful expression appeared on her face. To rid her of it, I stroked her forehead and said: "I don't think I did. That much is true. But I ought to have understood that what you believed was precious to you — so precious that I never should have brought you face to face with even the possibility of other thoughts."

Some inner light seemed to brighten her whole

face. With a faint, tired cry of joy she put her arms about me and said good-night.

I put out the candle beside her bed and left the room softly. My heart was overflowing with gratitude for all she had said. It was as if she had given me a treasure to be cherished.

The moment I thought of this, I was struck by the fact that I already seemed to be seeking for her in memory. "She is leaving me," I thought. To my astonishment I noticed, that now I could harbor this thought without bitterness, merely because I was closer to her than I had ever been before. "She will not die," I thought the next moment. "She is going to live." And I discovered no contradiction in the sequence of my thoughts.

I sat in my room, trying to read. But I was too agitated, too happy over the rare wealth that had become mine. And suddenly I saw my wife as she was during our summer by the west coast — as she was at the moment when she turned from the window in the pilot's house toward me, and I could feel ourselves united in a common love to the unfathomable sea that knows no bounds. There was a resemblance between what I experienced then and what now filled me with happiness and hope. At the same time I recalled how many long years I had been yearning for the sea.

Like a mirage, there rises in my mind a long forgotten memory. A boy stands on a tall rock

looking out over the sea. The rock is steep, and at its feet rage the wildly frothing waves. The boy has opened his coat. He holds it extended with both hands so that it gives the effect of a sail. He finds a divine delight in being able to defy the storm that threatens to cast him from the rock into the sea. This delight is cut short by a voice shouting his name through the storm. A pair of arms stronger than his own seize him and carry him off forcibly, both from the dangerous spot and from the view of the sea that cries aloud of perils and of bravery.

The boy was I, and I smile a melancholy smile as the hours of the night pass by unnoticed and I sit alone staring at what is about to happen. Now I have what the boy longed for, but the storm has carried me farther out than I was minded. Now I wish that the elements might subside, or that some one stronger than myself might carry me off from the danger which I thought could never frighten me.

At the same time I know this to be impossible. And with a shameful, shivery feeling, I bethink myself of my wife's suffering, which is greater than mine.

Chapter XII

NOT many days later I was called home by a telephone message, informing me that my wife had had a bad attack of convulsions. It was a serious matter, they told me, and I was asked to hasten my return.

That day I had bid my wife good-bye before going to work. It was the first of May, and we had discussed how to make the day pleasant for the boys, as our custom had been in the past. And to begin with, I found it impossible to grasp that there could be any reality in what I had just heard.

Accordingly I used the time left before the departure of the train to buy a little fruit and other things required by the occasion. It could only be a passing trouble, I said to myself, as I sat in the car loaded with packages. To pass the time, I picked up a newspaper and tried to read. For a while I succeeded because I struggled to take everything in the most matter-of-fact way possible, hoping thus to prevent my anxiety from overwhelming me, at least while I remained on the train. But the nearer I approached home, the more I felt the anxiety underlying everything I did. My thoughts would not keep pace with my eyes that were moving automatically down the columns of the newspaper. Soon I noticed that my eyes were

straying without purpose from one column to the other. I folded the paper together, and with a pang these thoughts flashed through my mind:

"You are going toward what you have feared. It is useless to deny that you have feared it all the time. You have never believed that she could live. You have merely tried to make yourself believe she could live. Now the hour has come, and you cannot escape it."

An unnatural calm seized me. The reason was, perhaps, that I was going toward a final certitude, in the face of which I should know that all further struggle had become futile. "God, if she must die," I muttered, "let her at least die painlessly." And still I wondered how I could be so composed. I looked about on the platform when the train stopped. I expected some one to meet me, but no one was there. "Then she is still alive," I thought, with the same peculiarly lucid composure. The next moment I thought: "Perhaps it means that everything is over. They have understood that I did not wish to be upset before so many strange eyes." Yet I maintained the same strange numbness even in the face of this possibility. I started slowly to walk homeward. I climbed the hill with heavy steps. I looked up at her window, and I thought I saw her as she looked when she was dressed for the first time after her first illness. She had draped a light-colored cape over the black

dress she always wore nowadays, and the window was wide open. She leaned out and waved her hand at me, impatient because I had not looked up more quickly, and she trembled with eagerness at giving me the pleasure of seeing her up and walking without support. This memory flashed through my mind, and instinctively I looked up, although I knew well enough that no one could be at the window waving me a welcome.

Then a new thought laid hold on me: "For more than a year and a half you have been expecting her to die, and you have mourned her as if she already had passed away. Now you have no emotion left. Your sorrow has burned out, consumed by its own flame, and now there is nothing but ashes left."

A few moments later I stood in the bedroom and saw that my wife was unconscious. I listened for her breathing, took her by the hand, and tried to make her hear me. I understood that all efforts were futile, and so I myself went downstairs to get the doctor on the telephone, not because I thought it necessary, but because I felt it to be a thing I must do. He promised to come. Slowly I retraced my steps up the stairway, where, through the open door of the sickroom, I could hear my wife's breathing that alone seemed to dominate the otherwise silent house.

Then I caught sight of Olof, standing on the

stairs as if listening. I put my hand on his shoulder, meaning to pass him. But the boy stopped me.

"Why does mamma snore in that peculiar way?" he said. He flushed as if he had said something improper, and tried vainly to smile.

"That is the sound you generally hear," I answered, "when a person is about to die."

The boy did not burst into tears. He merely nodded and looked away.

"He, like me, has expected it," I thought.

At the same time I noticed both how big he was, and how small.

Then it was as something had melted within me. "Now comes the worst," I thought. "What you have not yet faced. The children — the children!" And so, while the nurse sat alone by the sickbed, I went downstairs with the boys to have dinner and to discuss what was about to happen.

How we talked together that day and those that followed! How we lowered our voices as if fearful of disturbing her whose ears could not be reached by any sound!

My boys seemed unexpectedly of my own age — like two contemporaries who alone had shared everything with me, and who alone understood everything. To them it was no strange matter that mamma should join Sven. She had told them about it so many times. To them there was nothing perturbing in the thought that mamma should pass

away because she did not wish to live. They were not troubled by any theories. They did not pass judgment. They did not try to expound what to them was simple and exalted. They knew merely that if mamma should die and leave them, the reason was that she had grown ill and weak, and had no more strength to live. If anyone had told them that their mother thereby proved herself less fond of them, they would have laughed or become incensed.

Now they told me many things I had not heard. And as we talked, I seemed to catch the sound of my own sorrow as if reaching me from a great distance, and yet from within me. I understood that it would come closer some time, and that it would bring relief. But for the moment it could not conquer the composure that reigned within me, and that I retained even when the doctor came out of the sickroom to tell me what I already knew.

But before he arrived, I was summoned to the bedroom by a loud cry. When I entered, I found my wife in convulsions that seemed to begin at her face and pass downward until they shook her whole body. We could do nothing. And those dreadful attacks returned at intervals.

The doctor stopped them by an injection, and the former peacefulness was restored, but consciousness did not return. For two whole days she lay in the same coma that held her when I first

arrived. Long after the convulsions had ceased, I seemed to see her face twist and twitch in the same frightful manner. Then I recalled the deathbed of Sven. I remembered seeing the same thing then, from the twisting of face and mouth to the shaking of the limbs and the cramped clenching of the fists. And I recalled her words: "When I die, I shall die just as Sven did." I recalled smiling to myself when I heard those words, thinking them a manifestation of overwrought nerves. Now, when they had come true, I could not get away from them. How could she know? If she did not know, how could she tell with such assurance? Was this coincidence nothing but a chance? Would it be right, in any event, to brand a thing as chance merely because one did not wish to have it explained?

I sat for hours by my wife's bed, leaving the room only to get fresh air and rest. With the boys I sat right by the bed, and we whispered to each other, giving voice to words that would never recur, and that none of us can recall now. I slept fully dressed on the bed beside Elsa — my little Elsa, who would never wake again. I kept watch alone, not only to give the nurse a chance to rest, but so that I might possess the memory of a few hours at least, when no one but we two occupied that room of death.

It is said that the entire life of a dying person

sweeps through his memory just before the end comes. I think it is quite as it should be, to review one's whole life at that moment, and perhaps in a new light. I know personally that, during this last night, when daylight was so long in coming, and when the boys had gone to bed utterly tired out, I saw my own life and all that she and I had lived in common as I had never seen it before. And I saw that out of what she had told me, I had charged my mind with what I rather should have tried to forget, while I had forgotten what, above all, should have been stored up in my mind. I had cherished whatever she said in accordance with my own desire, and I had forgotten whatever she said in opposition to it. While believing myself to be doing everything for her, I had merely labored for myself and my own happiness. All I had lived through became concentrated in this thought as in a single focal point.

She had drawn me into the very shadow of death. That much I saw now, as a grey day broke outside the window and a ring of dawn outlined the horizon. On my own accord, and of my free will, I had never gone there, but would rather have fled and forgotten that anything of the kind existed. Sitting by her bed, it seemed that I knew no more of the world than when I first came to life in this maze of contradictions and took my first steps through it in constant bewilderment at

all I encountered. There had always been an element of wonder within me. I had always had a feeling that only one half of what I experienced was real. I had always, so to speak, projected myself into the future, from what was toward the unknown that was to come. I had always dreamed of happiness, and happiness had never appeared to me in any form but that of a home. I had won this happiness; won it as hardly one out of a thousand may; but death, of whom I would never think, had trailed me invisibly. He took my little boy with the golden hair and the eyes of an angel. When the boy died, death bent over me more closely than ever, folding his black wings about my house and not letting me go until he had deprived me and mine of her who to us was more precious than anything else in life, because she was more precious to us than life itself.

I rose and looked out. I listened to her breathing, and I could not make myself realize that it was my wife who lay there doomed to die. I bent over her and moistened her lips and tongue with water. I watched her until everything became black before my eyes and I could see nothing at all. But I seemed to be very close to her real self; and if within her remained a memory that, although inaccessible to me and separated from what we mortals call existence, yet labored and struggled with her own life, then I knew myself to be surely a part

of it. There I should be as I could never see myself, and as no one but she could ever see me.

While my thoughts circled in this manner about what we two had experienced together, I forgot myself and saw only her. Young and affectionate she came to meet me, but under all the happiness that radiated from her and put elasticity into her steps, there lay a melancholy that was the more potent because it remained unexpressed so long. Very, very early I realized, as I seemed now to recall, that her whole being moved on a plane not shared by others. She was created to taste happiness and then die, and a day came when any effort to make her live was cruelty. She could not mourn for a while and then forget. She could only mourn and die. Forgetful of all else in the face of her destiny, I should have known that she always spoke the truth, but never more so than when her speech seemed strange and impossible to me. And never was she more truthful than when grief sent the words to her lips and she asked my permission to die.

Why did I not let her? Why did I try to force her against her will and beyond her power? Why did I fail to understand that nothing but a tremendous over-exertion had enabled her to come and go in our home for two long years, smiling with us who wanted to smile, and playing with us who wanted to play?

How could I be so cruel? How is it possible to be so cruel out of a mere failure to see clearly?

All these questions fused finally into a new one: how could she love me when I caused her so much pain against my own will?

With a sense of being able to follow her thoughts, already separated from mine, I seemed sure of having done all this against my will, and of knowing what her feelings for me must be, although I had never been willing to believe it! But no answer would ever come to that final question. She would never wake out of her stupor. And with my heart full of despair, I must sooner or later turn toward the new life without her that was waiting for me.

Thus I strove to imagine the road taken by her thoughts as she slipped more and more under the spell of death. It was as if I had surrendered myself and my own life to death; as if she and I together had settled our score with the world. Everything within and without assumed such giddy proportions that nothing seemed within my reach. In all this there was no consolation — nothing but a distressing farewell. Slowly the hours passed by, and already I was approaching that moment of irresistible fatigue when one's eyes close and one's hands are clasped in prayer that everything may be over.

Then the regular breathing suddenly ceased, and

my heart seemed to turn into stone. I believed that death had arrived, and I ran to rouse the boys. They came still drunk with sleep and very solemn. As they sat down by the bed, I recalled what she had said once: "When I die, I want no one but you and the boys to be present. After all, I belong only to you."

Thus we sat now, and while puzzling over the significance of her light breathing and waiting the end, we observed that her eyes were moving as if she had struggled to open them, and we saw her turn in the direction of Sven's portrait on the wall, and we heard her say, "Nenne."

The little word came feebly and almost inaudibly, but still she had spoken. Convulsively we grasped each others' hands, and our tears flowed, not in sorrow, but in joy that we had heard her voice once more.

From that moment she was aware of our presence. From that moment there was a farewell in every mien, every movement, every word. Hearing our voices, she raised one eyelid just as Sven had done, and we could notice that she recognized us and was conscious of our endearments.

Once more she uttered Sven's name as if wishing to tell us that she saw him and was on her way to him. Then she sank back into herself, and we sat with bated breath, watching for a sign that she had not yet left us and passed away.

Then she opened her left eye again, as Sven had done, and her glance sought mine. I bent down over her and saw that she was trying to speak. But she had not the strength, and with an expression of unspeakable grief she sank back into the torpor that is the herald of death. Several times she repeated her effort. Each time her face assumed that expression of distressed impotence, and each time it became more heart-breaking. It was as if she were no longer one of us, but nevertheless wished to say something before she went away forever — as if she could not die without having communicated her message to us who should live after her. It was horrible to witness her struggle, but more horrible was the possibility of missing her final word. Once more I bent over her, and in my desperation I poured a whispered appeal into her ear. Then she opened her eyes and looked at me, and I saw that she had heard me. With as much tension as if my whole future life had depended on her words, I put my ear close to her mouth.

Then I heard her voice. At no other time has a voice reached my ear from such a distance. It was so faint as to be barely distinguishable. It could hardly be herself, but merely her spirit, that spoke. But her words came clearly and distinctly, and no one but I could hear them: "I . . . . love . . . . you all . . . . so much."

I must have screamed with grief, for I noticed hands that took hold of me and supported me. And the cry that broke from my lips must have reached my dying wife, since it wrung from her a groan of agonized sorrow. It meant that she had heard me without being able to put her lifeless hand on my head. I can recall the sound of that groan whenever I think of it.

To give voice to those words she had struggled for hours. When she had uttered them, she sank back into quietude. Peace fell on her face. There was nothing more she wished, nothing she required. Her account with life was settled as soon as she had been able to express her love for the boys and me before she died.

A few hours later her eyes closed forever. It happened without a struggle, quietly and gently as when a candle goes out.

She lived her own life, and she died her own death.

She was so weak that she escaped the struggle of death. She had struggled long enough before.

But she found strength to give us a word to cherish and to live by when she was gone. Her love was stronger than death.

Blessed be her memory!

Chapter XIII

I BROKE the letter lying in the top drawer of the little chest from my childhood days that had become Sven's shrine. It read as follows:

I have talked so many times of death, but some time it must come. Whoever be the first to find this sheet must show it to the person or persons who are to have charge of my funeral. O God, as I write this word — how I wish that I were as near the grave as the word is to the paper! Of course, I want to live for my loved ones, who have done for me more than human beings ever did for one another, and I am trying as hard as I can. But if I fail — and so it seems — I wish to be buried in my white dress. All the linen used by my angel child, Nenne, is in the bottom drawer of the chest. There are towels, too, if such be needed. But let them remain with me. Let as many of his things be put in my coffin as there be room for. I shall rest easily even on the hardest of his little toys. . . . .

One more final wish. If I die at home, try if possible to make my last bed in Nenne's room.

Thank you for everything, for everything. I am an unfortunate being, who cannot live in spite of all tenderness and love. . . . .

Your *Elsa*

She was buried in her white dress, which she had not used since her thoughts turned with fondness to the earth and all that belongs to it. Everything was done in accordance with her wish, and her last bed was prepared in Sven's little room. There she lay with her wealth of black hair spread over the white dress, and all the blossoms of spring surrounding her. Against the little window behind her rose a purple azalea, and yellow roses were scattered all over the bed.

She looked as if she were sleeping, and her face seemed rejuvenated by death.

Thus she joined Sven, as she had said she would, and therefore this is "the book about Little Brother," who came to be his mother's angel, but not in the manner we had hoped. When he left, he took her with him.

Chapter XIV

BUT this book is also the story of a struggle with death. It is the story of a man who fought and was defeated, but who is not ashamed of his defeat.

I have been far abroad since then, and many people have I seen. But everything remained foreign to me and lifeless, until this book was written. It was written during bright summer nights, where the outermost islands gave way to the open sea. And it was written by a lonely man, who is no longer alone.

During long weeks he looked out over the sea, which, like any human life worth living, is never fully at rest. There he saw the beacon lights blinking above the troubled waters. Should the beacons be extinguished, still the stars will sparkle in the sky.

. . . . . .

THE END

A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST

of Gustaf af Geijerstam's principal works

1882. Bleak Days. *(Gråkallt)*. Stories.
1883. Fleecy Clouds. *(Strömoln)*. Stories.
1883. Contemporaries. *(Ur samtiden)*. Literary studies.
1884. Poor People. I. *(Fattigt folk)*. Stories.
1885. Erik Grane. *(Erik Grane)*. A novel from Uppsala.
1887. Pastor Hallin. *(Pastor Hallin)*. A novel.
1887. For the Present. *(Tills vidare)*. Stories.
1888. Issues of the Day. *(Stridsfrågor för dagen)*. Five lectures.
1888. Father-in-law. *(Svärfar)*. A comedy in four acts.
1889. Poor People. II. *(Fattigt folk)*. Stories.
1889. The New-Year's Night of the Centuries. *(Seklernas nyårsnatt)*. A fairy play in one act.
1890. The Sheriff's Tales. *(Kronofogdens berättelser)*. Stories.
1891. Never in this Life. *(Aldrig i lifvet)*. A comedy in three acts.
1892. Satires and Dreams. *(Satirer och drömmar)*. Poems.
1892. Stockholm Stories. *(Stockholmsnoveller)*. Stories.
1894. Criminals. *(Förbrytare)*. A tragedy in two scenes.
1894. New Conflicts. *(Nya brytningar)*. Five lectures on literature.
1894. Lars Anders and Jan Anders and Their Children. *(Lars Anders och Jan Anders och deras barn)*. A rustic comedy in three acts.
1894. Per Olsson and His Old Woman. *(Per Olsson och hans käring)*. A comedy of peasant life, in three acts.
1895. Medusa's Head. *(Medusas hufvud)*. A novel.
1896. The Struggle for Love. *(Kampen om kärlek)*. Four stories about marriage.
1896. My Boys. *(Mina pojkar)*. Stories.
1897. Lost in Life. *(Vilse i lifvet)*. A novel.
1898. The Outermost Island. *(Det yttersta skäret)*. A sea-coast novel.
1898. Collected Peasant Stories. I & II. *(Samlade allmogeberättelser)*.
1898. The Comedy of Marriage. *(Äktenskapets komedi)*. A novel.
1899. Happy People. *(Lyckliga människor)*. A novel.
1900. The Book About Little Brother. *(Boken om lillebror)*. A novel.
1901. Woman's Power. *(Kvinnomakt)*. A novel.

1902. Nils Tufvesson and His Mother. *(Nils Tufvesson och hans moder).* A peasant novel.
1903. Forest and Sea. *(Skogen och sjön).* Stories.
1904. Karin Brandt's Dream. *(Karin Brandts dröm).* A novel of olden time.
1904. The Battle of Souls. *(Själarnes kamp).* A novel.
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1905. Dangerous Forces. *(Farliga makter).* A novel.
1906. The Brothers Mörk. *(Bröderna Mörk).* A manorial novel.
1907. The Eternal Riddle. *(Den eviga gåtan).* A novel.
1908. Other People's Business. *(Andras affärer).* A comedy in four acts.
1908. "Wonderful Augusta." *(Stiliga Agusta).* A comedy in four acts.
1908. Big Claes and Little Claes. *(Stor-Klas och Lill-Klas.)* A fairy play in seven scenes.
1908. The Old Manor. *(Den gamla herrgårdsallén).* A novel.
1909. Riddles of Solitude. *(Ensamhetens gåtor).* A re-issue of peasant stories and novels, in three parts.
1909. Thora. *(Thora).* A novel of olden time.

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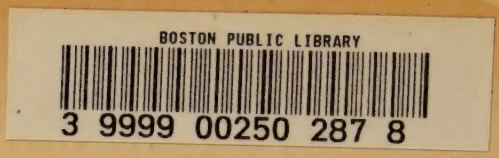
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